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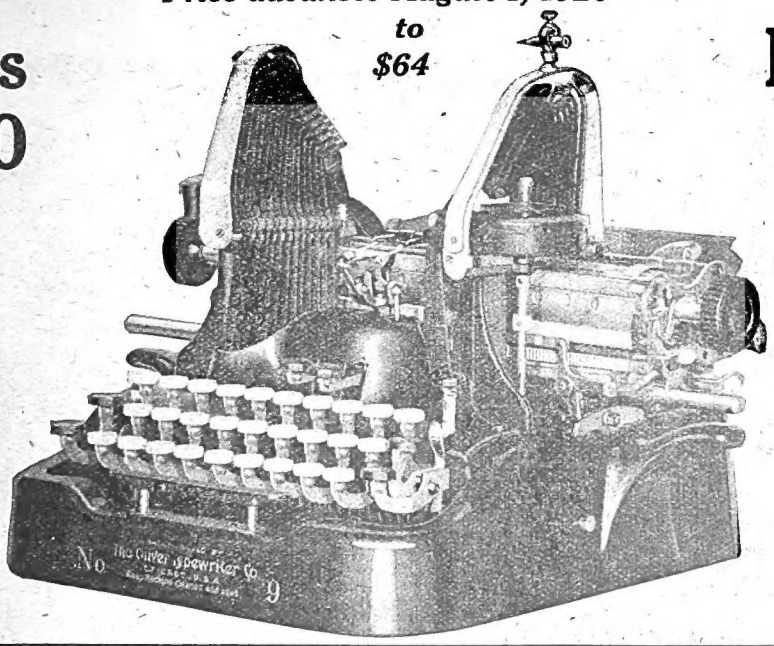

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City.....State.....
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ADVENTURE June 18th, 1920

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Vol. 25 No. 4
Serial No. 154

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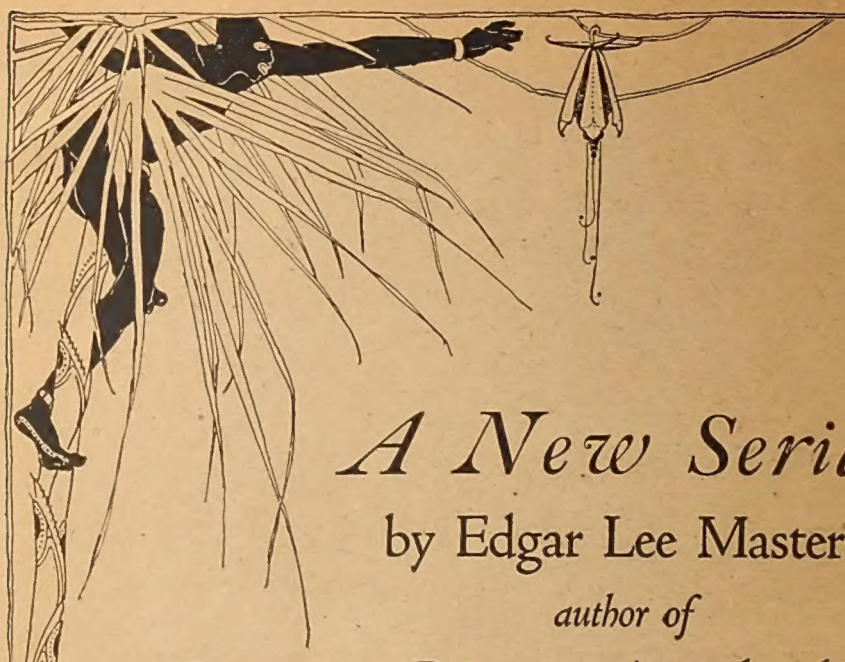

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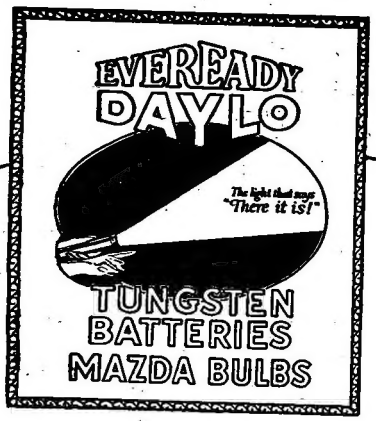

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Get an early look at the picture. Submit as many answers as you wish. Contest blanks are free at all Daylo dealers. All answers must be mailed before midnight, August 1st, 1920.

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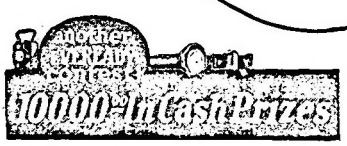

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5	Prizes—$200.00 each	1000.00
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104	Prizes	Total $10,000.00

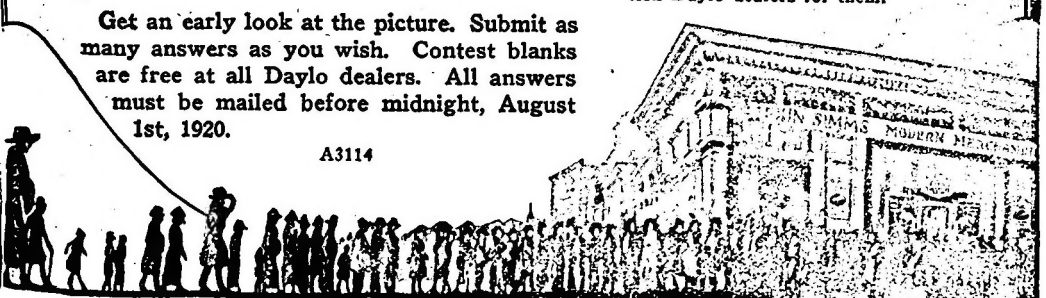
Answers will be judged by the editors of "LIFE" and contestants must abide by their judgment.

If two or more contestants submit the identical answer selected by the judges for any prize, the full amount of the prize will be paid to each.

Contest begins June 1, 1920, and ends Midnight, August 1, 1920. Postmarks on letters will determine if letter has been mailed before close of contest.

Answers must contain not more than 12 words. Hyphenated words count as one word.

Complete Contest Rules are printed on Contest Blank. Ask Daylo dealers for them.



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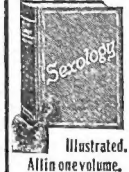

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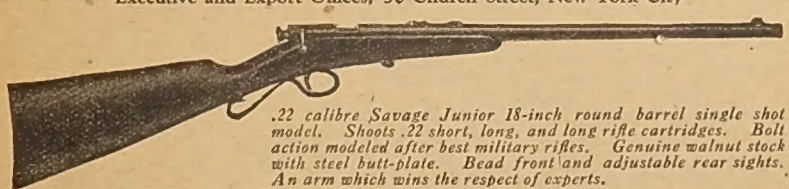

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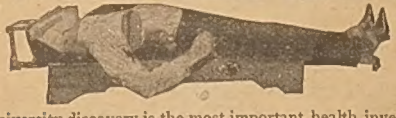

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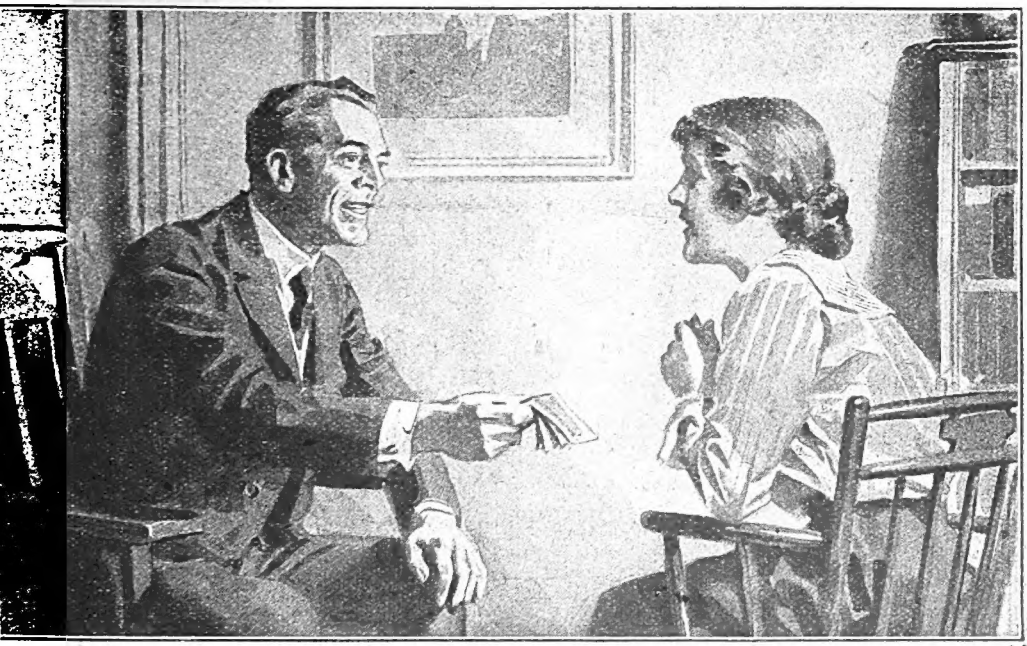

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VOL. XXV Nº IV MID-JUNE 1920

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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His job is Quartermaster, U. S. N., and his gospel is Americanism, one hundred per cent.

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Cover Design . . . . . **Edgar F. Wittmack**

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off the Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1920. State of New York. County of New York. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of the *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher: THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Managing Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York City. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock.) *Owners:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Stockholders:* THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. Stockholder of FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY: THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Stockholders of BUTTERICK COMPANY. GEORGE B. BLACK, 812 Lincoln Avenue, Mendota, Illinois. H. F. MORSE, 3 West 46th Street, New York City, N. Y. LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. MRS. ARETHUSA POND, San Remo Hotel, New York City, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, 280 Broadway, New York City. AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, 140 Broadway, New York City. R. A. VAN WYCK, 140 Broadway, New York City. G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. BEN F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. MARIE A. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William Street, New York City. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.)* None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is. (This information is required from daily publications only.) ARTHUR S. HOFFMAN, Editor. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 7th day of April, 1920. CECIL L. WAHL, Notary Public, Kings County. Certificate filed New York County. (*My commission expires March 30, 1922.*) (SEAL.) Form 3526.—Ed. 1916.

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Adventure
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Adam's Earth

A Complete Novel

By George Brydges Rodney

Author of "The Fire-Bug," "The Seven Cities of Cibola," etc.

I

UNDER a red ledge of loose shale rock, a small greasewood fire smoked and stank in the early dawn. A great pile of newly cut brush lay beside a hollow scooped in the sand; a deep place for the shoulders, another for the hips and a shallower depression for the feet; a trick that every plainsman knows. A frying-pan with two pieces of bacon in it waited for the cook, and a dirty comforter, which is far warmer than a blanket, rolled up into a dirty ball beside the depression in the sand, showed where the man had slept. The camp was complete.

A voice came over the ridge; a high, cracked, falsetto voice raised in a running commentary on things in general.

"Git up there—darn you! You've had twelve hours now to do four hour's grazin' in. 'T ain't my fault if there 's nothin' here but rocks fer you to eat. I done the best I could. Get over that ridge, I tell you——"

A small burro limped into sight. His forefeet were hobbled so that he progressed in a series of kangaroo-like jumps. Behind him came his owner. An occasional rock punctuating the profanity hurtled past the burro's ears.

He hopped on down the slope, fell and rolled over, got to his feet and drove straight for the camp-fire, pausing at it long enough to make a hurried but successful snatch at the bacon in the frying-pan. At the far side of the fire he suddenly halted, faced about and with flattened ears, a piece of bacon hanging from his mouth, he faced his owner.

"Of all the— ——! If you couldn't steal a piece o' fryin' meat off'n a red-hot stove! I'm lucky you left the fryin'-pan. An' it's the last piece o' hawg-meat in this camp! Do you know you've eat my dinner?"

The burro gravely nodded his head.

"You do, hey? Maybe you'd like a chaw o' terbaccer fer dessert."

It was pure sarcasm and it was as successful as sarcasm generally is. The burro seized the extended plug and bolted it while the man hopped up and down swearing volubly.

"That there's my last plug! Just fer that I'll put twenty pound o' rock on you besides the pack. Five days' hikin' yet an' nothin' but musty flour to eat! Oh you——"

He lighted his filled pipe from the embers of the fire and rolled up his bedding with a practised hand. After that came a twenty-minute fight with the astute burro, who had

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learned how to avoid capture by dropping his nose to earth till the lariat loop had dropped, when he calmly stepped out of it. It generally took Jewett twenty minutes to pack.

"Stand steady. Want me to fit the fryin'-pan over your head fer a necklace? All right! Well, Balaam, I reckon we 're about ready."

He swung the sawbuck to the little back, slung the hundred-and-sixty-pound pack into place and with the skilful touch of forty years flung the "squaw hitch" that needs but a single pull to loosen.

He was a careful packer. Years of experience had taught him that kindness paid—even to a burro.

"There! One last light for the pipe an' we'll hit the trail. No more sow-belly an' sour-dough fer us, Balaam! We've hit it good fer a couple of jackasses. It'll be the coast fer us, boy; alfalfa fer you an' airtights fer me——"

He bent swiftly over the fire, retrieving an ember for his pipe. Balaam licked appreciatively at a flat stone whereon certain bacon-grease had fallen.

The unusual delicacy was too much for him. He shook himself till his pack rattled, squealed, lowered his head and kicked with all his force.

That kick, delivered with all the strength of his knotty little body, aimed at nothing, found its mark in Benjamin Jewett as he straightened up from the fire. The pointed hoofs, as sharp as cold-chisels, with a four-hundred-pound drive behind them went straight home into the pit of the old man's stomach.

He crumpled up like an old rag and fell forward across the fire. Instant reaction at the touch of the hot coals sent him to one side, where he rolled and struggled in silent agony.

TEN minutes passed; ten sweating, sickening minutes for the old man. Once he fainted; then, consciousness returning, he strove to reach the big canteen that swung from the saddle. He could not raise himself, and Balaam got away and wandered up the slope.

The man groaned and sank back again and lay at length in the hot sand in the growing glare. Time and again he strove but each time fell back with violent nausea.

After each effort he dropped into unconsciousness; but the habits of forty years are not shed in a moment. He managed to claw his way to the hole where he had slept. One last effort he made.

"You Balaam! Come here! Here 's some salt fer you. Oh, you little devil——"

The burro never moved.

"If I could reach you, I'd——"

He dropped into his wallow again, unconscious. Balaam quietly moved across the ridge and down the far side. There was no sign of life except that a great buzzard floating high in air circled once and dropped a hundred feet, winging his way in widening circles toward the place.

IN THE desert any sign of life is worth noticing. One buzzard dropping earthward is seen and followed by another and another till a score of birds are winging their way to some horrible feast.

"An' that 's six——"

Tom Hardin pulled up his pony on the top of a ridge and gazed skyward. He watched the circling black dots above him, noted how their swinging orbits narrowed to the southward and how they were winging slowly to the ground.

"Now what can there be over there? There can't be cows for there's no water. There's no game here except maybe an antelope or two. Get up, old horse! Let's get over the next rise and see."

The pony plodded on, fetlock deep in the shifting sand, his ears pricking forward now and then as the rider swayed in the saddle. Men, and women too, would have looked twice at Tom Hardin, dirty though he was from days and nights spent in the Land of Little Water; would have noted with approval the lines of the lean jaws; the calmly self-reliant look in the eyes that saw everything and accepted what he chose. His blue-flannel shirt was open at the neck and a red-and-blue neckerchief about his throat hung ready for its legitimate use; to cover nose and mouth from the sand-storms that sweep the changing surface of the Painted Desert.

The six years since he had left college had set their mark on him; the ineradicable mark of the West, which is the mark of self-reliance. The men who fail in the West drift out of it into easier places, content to cease gambling with a Fate that demands such tremendous stakes, and are content to

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glide unresistingly with the stream wherever it shall take them; perhaps to be whirled into some rushing channel; more frequently to be checked in some back eddy to swing in endless circles with floating junk.

Tom Hardin had taken every chance that came his way. His degrees of Mining Engineer and Metallurgist meant merely to him that the door was open to him as botany had opened it to Agassiz. His work-shop was the world.

Two of the six years had been spent with big mining companies till he had learned their methods. After that he fell into the grip of strange places.

The surface of the earth so far had not been even scratched. Why should he scratch it for other men? Why not scratch his own part?

That was why he became a knight of the pick and pack. That was why he knew the land from the icy slopes of Copper River to the jungles of Tehuantepec. Always it had been something just a little farther on that had drawn him.

He would never have called it adventure, for after all it is adventure that separates a man from a ten-dollar-a-week job. He had seen other men, good companions of the trail, drop away to follow some woman; but he had always grinned and passed on. His time had not yet come.

He passed on over the next desert-rise, never suspecting that a patient ass was waiting there to show him the beginning of a new trail.

His pony nosed the slope, reached for a sage-bush and grunted; and Tom looked over the crest to find himself staring full into the inquisitive face of a loaded burro.

"What the ——!"

A slap in the face could not have surprized him more.

"How came you here?"

Now a packed burro meant only one thing: Some one was near. Packed burros do not stray far from camp.

He leaned forward and gazed, his heart in his eyes. Then he struck spurs to his pony and came clattering down the slope.

But Balaam had no mind to be caught. He had not escaped from his owner two days before to be caught now, when—he sensed the fact—the new man had no rope. He gave a playful squeal and galloped awkwardly back on his own trail for a quarter of a mile, Tom plunging along behind him. A willing burro can lead a jaded pony.

The burro halted on a wind-blown, sandy ridge; then disappeared over the crest. Tom pressed forward.

"The little devil's got to stop somewhere! He can't go on forever! He can't have been packed very long. He'd have rolled and broken the saddle. What the ——!"

His astonished eyes saw an old camp; they saw the wind-blown embers of a two-day-old fire and beyond them, half-covered by the shifting sands of the desert that showed red and slate-blue, yellow and amber and white, he saw the prone figure of a man.

Instantly his startled pony was forced into a gallop. A moment later Tom had flung himself from the saddle and was wrenching loose his canteen.

"By all that's holy! What is it, man?"

There was no answer, for Benjamin Jewett was very nearly past all speech.

Tom dug and clawed and scratched and pawed till he had cleared the poor figure from the drifted sands. A little of the sun-warmed water from his canteen cleared the parched throat and Tom stuffed his rolled-up coat under the uneasy head. A moment later he had unsaddled and had his saddle-blanket stretched over some long grease-wood switches, shading the gray, old face.

By this time Balaam, cautiously advancing toward them, nosed the new pony, who promptly stepped upon his trail-rope. A moment later Tom had the surprized ass by the nose; had knee-haltered him.

In five minutes he had unpacked. The fire, long banked by the shifting sand, was blown into new life and a pot of coffee, the prospector's panacea, was bubbling on the flames.

Twice Tom looked over his shoulder as he worked. He felt eyes boring into his back. The second time he looked he caught Jewett, his eyes open in surprize. Tom went to him and sat down.

"Can you talk, friend?"

"Not—much. Who're you?"

"Name's Tom Hardin — prospector — miner—what you please. I saw your burro over there and followed him. Who're you?"

"Jewett—Ben Jewett."

The gray lips barely moved. A dead leaf laid across them would not have fluttered.

"Not Ben Jewett—?"

"Yes—know me?"

"No—I've heard of you. That's all—"

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Tom checked himself. He did not wish to hurt the old man's feelings. He did not want to say what he had heard, that for two years he had heard men say, "You're as crazy as Ben Jewett."

What was the use to tell the old man that men held him to be a crazy visionary; a desert-rat who had been left high and dry by the departing ships of civilization? A man who had had his day?

"What ails you, Jewett?"

"Burro kicked me in the belly. I'm done fer, Hardin—I'm done fer. I'm dead now from the waist down——"

Tom noted the sunken eyes, the telltale lines of pain that ran from mouth to nostril; marked well the gray lips. But he said only—

"Some coffee 'll fix you up, I hope."

"Think so? Pull up my shirt and look—I've seen——"

Tom did so.

By sheer force of will the old man gave no sign as Tom's fingers strayed over the injured body, but his old eyes seized and held the eyes of his new friend. He was quick to see a new look come into Tom's eyes.

"An' you talk o' helpin' me! Man! I know when I'm all in! It ain't only the kick that done it. It's seventy-six years o' livin'—forty of it desert-rattin'. Balaam there only helped it along a leetle, pore little cuss. I'm most all in, Hardin. Will you stay with me?"

"Of course I'll stay with you. I'll pack you in yet——"

"Pack ——! Maybe I'm good fer five hours—no more. Will you stay?"

"Of course I will! Let me try to make you more comfortable."

There was little enough to be done. The injuries wrought by those chisel-like hoofs were too great. The man's whole chest was caved in and his own helplessness had made matters worse, for the weight and heat of the desert sands had aggravated his hurts.

He was rapidly dying, and dying in great pain. Tom sensed it in the tense lines in the old face; in the quivering muscles that twitched when he thought his new friend could not see him.

All that he could do was little enough. A little shade, a little warm water; the best he had, and then— Sitting, he watched the light go slowly out in the old eyes.

"FORTY years of it—" the old man was panting heavily—"I reckon thirty-nine years an' ten months was spent hunting up loose burros—like that —— Balaam. Bring my pack over here——"

Tom got it and brought it over to the fire.

"You honest?"

Jewett's tone was one of fierce insistence.

"As honest as need be. Why?"

"No matter. If you ain't it can't be helped. If you air—why then—you air. I just got to trust you. Man! Hardin, I've found my fortune——"

Tom smiled queerly behind his hand. He had seen so many prospectors who had said the same thing. Not one had actually made a modest stake. They had all found a fortune but never seemed to be able to realize on it. Every one had a fortune—just in sight.

"That's fine," he said.

"Think I'm crazy, do you? Well, I ain't! Wait—I'll prove it to you! Not that I'm crazy—I don't mean that. Come here. Lean over."

Tom did so.

"Hardin—that your name?—well, Hardin, I've hit it. I've hit it, I tell you! For forty years I've hunted fer it an' now I've found it. We ain't twenty miles from it——"

"What is it?" Tom asked soothingly.

"The Mother Lode—that's what! The Mother Lode, I say! What do you say to that, Hardin?"

What was there to say to it? What Western-bred man does not know of the Mother Lode? What Western-bred man has not known scores of gray-bearded old desert-rats wandering over the face of the earth, hoping that some chance may lead them to the Mother Lode—the child of a disordered mind; that Mother Lode where gold grows overnight, pulsing through the rock crannies of the earth as the blood in a man's body pulses through his arteries. They claim that the gold in the tiny thin veins that men discover is but gold that has got into the capillaries of the earth's body, and that if they are followed intelligently they will lead back to the great main vein, and that in turn to the heart—the true Mother Lode where gold is actually made—where it originates.

Tom had frequently met men who were searching for the Mother Lode. This was the first man who claimed to have found it.

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"I've found it, I say—the Mother Lode! Did you hear, Hardin?"

"Aye! I heard you. All right, old man. You've found it all right. Get strong again and then you an' I'll take a trip over there an' stake it out an' you can work the place an' Crœsus 'll be a fool to us; but just now—here! Try some of this coffee."

Jewett pushed the cup from his lips.

"I've only got a few minutes to live. I don't want to talk coffee; I want to talk business. *Sabe* that?"

Tom looked at him. There was no sign of any mental weakness in the seamed old face. There was no mendacity written in the eyes. The man meant what he said.

"Bring my pack closer to me."

Tom did so.

"Open up the two corned-beef tins that're in the pack. Hurry up, man."

Under the urging insistence of the querulous voice Tom ripped the pack open and found two old corned-beef cans painted red. He brought them to Jewett.

"Rip 'em open! Rip 'em open, I say! What you got an ax fer if you can't use it? There—," as Tom struck.

The side of the first can folded back under the ax and Tom pulled from the can a heavy lump of weighty substance that was wrapped in a piece of an old salt sack. He tore it loose and almost dropped what he saw—a great brick-like lump of dull yellow metal.

"What——"

He gasped his astonishment, for his brain told him what it was.

"Gold. All gold. Solid gold."

The trembling hands of the dying man shot out and clawed it convulsively.

"Gold. I mined it an' smelted it an' weighed it. It's gold. Solomon never had none purer. Twenty-four pound of it there. Didn't I tell you? On'y you wouldn't b'lieve the old man——"

TOM looked at it critically. There was a queer tint to it; a greenish hue that he had never seen in any gold before. Also there were tiny particles of curiously transparent red sand, glittering like tiny rubies, that were embedded in the solid metal; and little fire-blisters that had no business there.

"Never mind that," the old man cackled feebly. "Ne'mind that now. The old man ain't sech a liar atter all; hey?

"I ain't got time to wait while you look. The other brick's jest like that one. You never seen gold like that; did you?"

"Where'd it come from?" gasped the startled Tom. "I—I never saw— Is there any more of it in the pocket where this came from?"

"More? Is there any more? I reckon by this time there'll be all you want to carry away. You kin make all you want to make. Man, it's the Mother Lode, I tell you."

"Yes—yes—I know——"

Obviously the man was as crazy as a loon. It was evident that he had struck some wonderfully rich pocket of remarkable ore and in some way he had smelted it. Very probably he had done it with charcoal and a blow-pipe, but——

"Get a piece of paper an' take down what I tell you. Ready? I got no time to wait. I want to tell you somethin' about my claim. You'll find it described in my note-book but you'll never find the cañon where the claim is onless you listen careful to me—See that range o' hills?

Tom nodded as the old hand swung northwestward.

"There's a thousand cañons in that range an' all look alike. I don't know how many I passed comin' out. My claim lies up a cañon. You'll know it by a dead burro that lies at the mouth of the cañon. One of my burros died there as I went in—I call it the Dead Burro claim. That's how you'll tell the cañon's the right one. Ready?"

"Yes."

Tom flattened his note-book on his knee.

"In the Name o' God, Amen. I, Benjamin Jewett, bein' sane an' in my right mind, do declare this to be my last will an' testament. —All right—I give an' bequeath all I own save an' exceptin' one jackass an' one twenty-four pound lump o' gold which I give to— What's your name, son?"

"Thomas Hardin. But you don't want to leave anything to me——"

"Hm! I don't want to leave nothin' to nobody, but I can't take it with me an' you may as well have it as anybody. To Thomas Hardin— Got it wrote?"

"Yes."

"—said property bein' the full ownership in a claim known as the Dead Burro claim, bounded an' described in my note-book. This claim to be the joint property evenly divided between Helen Keene— She's

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stenographer for Darke an' Wettin in the town o' Palo Verde. I went to them to grubstake me on this trip an' they wouldn't do it. Darke said I was too old. Then the girl done it."

"Yes, sir! She heard Darke talkin' to me an' she felt sorry an' she bet three hundred of her hard-earned dollars that I was right. She wins. Hear me, partner? She wins. She grubstaked me— Evenly divided between Helen Keene an' Thomas Hardin. Got it?"

"Yes, but——"

"But ——! Don't stop me! Can't you see that— Glory be! Look at the gold runnin' loose all over the sky an' ground— Why, the trees 're solid—Ah!"

It was a long-drawn sigh as the old head bowed forward on the sunken chest. A moment later Benjamin Jewett stretched his thin figure convulsively and with a little shudder closed his tired eyes.

Tom watched him for a little while; felt the wrists wherein the old pulses had quietly died and then with a little sigh got pick and shovel and set to work behind a giant cactus.

In two hours what was left of Benjamin Jewett lay in his tiny trench, where he lay with a great boulder on his chest so that no wandering coyote should disturb him. A little later Tom Hardin, his pack newly made, was driving the agile Balaam, who seemed to have renewed his lease on life, southwestward across the desert heading for Palo Verde.

II

THE offices of Darke & Wettin, Mining Engineers and Assayers, in the town of Palo Verde, were in a large, gray frame building that fronted the dusty plaza before the town hall. When Arizona was "wet" that plaza had been the center of four riotous blocks of saloons wherein every game of chance known to mortal man flourished and where fortunes were made and lost overnight. Now every other building dispensed soft drinks, salted peanuts and fly-blown pies. The other buildings were Chinese restaurants and laundries.

There was no earthly reason for a town where Palo Verde stood; therefore it throve. Why it had ever come into being or on what it throve none could say. Perhaps like most Arizona towns it had "occurred" when the cattle of some emigrant selected it as a good place to die.

After that, deprived of his transportation, the man stayed there, dug a well to save his life and became an oldest inhabitant. After him would come other men who, also handicapped by lack of transportation, stayed. Thus, possibly, Palo Verde began.

In time prospectors wandering out from it found rich claims of copper and of gold. These claims brought miners; assayers followed. Consequent litigation brought lawyers, so that in ten years Palo Verde had become a town. From time to time the floating population moved away, tempted by some night-bred rumors of richer diggings farther on; but there had always been a wave of incomers to take its place.

Among those who came first and stayed last was the firm of Darke & Wettin. They did a big business of buying on a falling market.

Mr. Darke was big and pursy and yellow, with a fat oiliness. In warm weather he exuded affability and perspiration, in cold weather he would not even sweat.

He knew the ore business from the inside out. Many of the seemingly reckless investments of the firm were made on his initiative. Many a prospector, grubstaked by Darke & Wettin, had come from the desert with glowing accounts of a rich find and had gone back to locate it, only to find eventually that some one else had got in ahead of him and had jumped the claim. It was never reported that Darke & Wettin had lost much money by any such transaction.

Julius Wettin was entirely different. A scientist from the beginning, he was the *Mr. Jorkins* of the firm. Any question of assays or ore studies was referred at once to Wettin.

For more than forty years he had not only kept abreast of the most modern schools but he added to this knowledge the lore of the earlier days when alchemy was considered a mystery, and his book-shelves were filled with translations of great rarity. He had studied Arabic in order to be able to read Ibn Asseh in the original, and the Book of Wisdom of Al Geber was one of his hand-books.

On a particularly hot day in August, Mr. Wettin tilted his chair back, wiped his face on a moist handkerchief and called out—

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"Miss Keene——"

In the outer office a chair pushed back; the door opened and a girl entered the private office. Such a girl as she was had no right in Palo Verde. The dark skirt and white shirtwaist failed utterly to hide the beauties of her figure that almost cried aloud for expression.

She was taller than most women, with very red lips and oddly bright hazel eyes that had little sparks in them like the sparks one sees in cats' eyes. The wavy brown hair was piled in masses on her little head that she carried high. The slightly aquiline nose showed determination, and the oddly crooked mouth that held a fascination of its own showed an unmistakable sense of humor which is the differentiation between man and beast.

She looked questioningly at Mr. Wettin. It was characteristic of her that she spoke no word.

"Have those assay reports gone to Mills yet?"

"I mailed them last night."

"Hm! How about that quit-claim notice to Fordyce?"

"That has been attended to also, Mr. Wettin."

Wettin picked up a black-rubber ruler and tapped his lips with it. It was very evident that he had something on his mind that he had not yet mentioned. A sudden interruption came as the door banged breezily open and the bulky figure of Obed Darke cast a blur of shadow across the table.

"Say, Julius—" he paused for a moment and then shot out the rest of his remark as if it pained him till he could get rid of it—"That old devil Jewett must have got some backin' somewhere. He's been gone over a month now. I wish we had taken him up once more. We could have——"

"All right—all right. We'll talk that over later. Just now——"

But Darke was not to be repressed.

"Do you remember a man named Jewett?" he asked of Helen. "He was a dirty old desert-rat. For ten years we've been grubstaking him, more as a matter of charity than for any other reason. You must remember him, Miss Keene. He always looked to be about a hundred years old."

"Yes. I know him quite well."

"The last time we had any dealings with him he gave us a good location but he didn't give us all the figures on it. I bet we've spent five hundred dollars on him. He came in here a month ago and wanted me to put up another grubstake on a wild search of his——"

Helen said nothing. She knew nothing of a little red book in that safe. It showed five hundred dollars spent in grubstaking Benjamin Jewett.

But it showed a profit of more than nine thousand dollars made from information that he had given them. That profit had accrued from many hundreds of miles that Benjamin Jewett and Balaam, his burro, had plodded across the waterless spaces of the land.

TO THEM came suddenly the quick patter of a pony's hoofs on the road outside; a sudden jingle and metallic clash of equipment, then a stamping in the hall interrupted him. A voice came from the hall.

"Darke & Wettin hole in here?"

Mr. Darke turned to the intruder.

"I am Mr. Darke. Yes, this is our office. Who are you, sir?"

"My name's Hardin. You don't know me. I want to see Miss Keene—Miss Helen Keene——"

"I am Miss Keene," said Helen quietly.

His hat being already in his hand, Tom merely bowed.

"I'd like a few moments' talk with you, Miss Keene, on a matter of business."

Helen looked at Mr. Wettin. He bowed.

"I'd like to see you for a minute, Darke, while Miss Keene is busy in the outer office. Sit down a minute."

Tom followed Helen into the outer office, closing the door behind him. She seated herself and turned her chair so that she faced him.

"What can you possibly want to see me about, Mr. Hardin? What business can you have with me?"

For a moment he did not answer her, but fumbled at the string of a package that he had laid upon her desk as he came in.

"I've got something here for you, Miss Keene. Do you remember an old man named Benjamin Jewett?"

Something falling in the inner office crashed like a gunshot.

"Yes. I knew him well," said Helen, wondering. "This is the second time today

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that I've heard his name mentioned. Why?"

"Well—I found the old man far out upon the desert. He was in a bad way. He had been away off in the Painted Desert prospectin' by himself and was on his way back with news of his find when his burro kicked him in the stomach. He was so badly hurt that he died out there last week——"

"Oh! I'm sorry. Poor old man! He was to me one of the most pathetic figures I have seen in the West. A man who had let the world go past him. Do you mean, Mr. Hardin, that that poor old man died alone out in the desert?"

"Why, no, Miss Keene. He was not alone. I was with him. He had been very badly hurt before I found him. Before he died he gave me something to give you. I've got it here."

He unwrapped the bulky bundle, disclosing to the girl's startled gaze a brick of dull-yellow metal exactly like the one that Jewett had bid Tom unwrap a week before in the sandy camp where he had died.

"Oh——"

The gasp of surprize that the girl gave was heard plainly by the two partners in the private office. Every word of Tom's speech had come to them through the open transom, and like *Oliver Twist* they wanted more.

"Before he died the old man told me that those fellows in there—" Tom motioned with his chin toward the private office—"had grubstaked him several times but that this time they had refused to put up the money and that you had done so, so that you were his partner——"

Again there came a note of interest, if Tom had but heard it, from the inner office. But he was intent on what he was saying and paid no heed to what Darke & Wettin might hear or think or do.

"I don't know what he really did find, Miss Keene. It is probably the vision of a mind disordered from the hardships of forty years of the life of a prospector. He gave me two bricks of bullion that weigh something over twenty-four pounds each—one's for you, one's for me—and this note-book with a lot of papers. He made a will too. Do you know his handwriting?"

"Oh, yes. I have seen it frequently."

"Read this then please."

By way of presenting credentials Hardin passed over the prospector's note-book, which Helen recognized with a nod; then showed her the will that he had drawn up at the old man's dictation.

Wettin and Darke, listening so hard that they nearly got earache, heard the girl draw her breath hard. There came a crackle of stiff paper then—

"Why, this makes us partners, Mr. Hardin."

"Yes, I suppose so. I hope so. I came to bring you the bullion and to show you the papers and to have a talk with you.

"Of course that will that the old man made has no value in law. For one thing, he is bequeathing property to which he has no actual title. Then too I am a beneficiary and a beneficiary can not be a witness to a will.

"I will get the papers when I go to the hotel and undo my pack. When will it be convenient for you to have me bring them to you?"

"Not till tonight, I fear. I have a great deal of work to do here, Mr. Hardin. After that I must go home and cook supper for myself and my mother. Can you come to my home this evening?"

Could he? Tom looked at the tall, graceful figure, at the beautiful face, at the smiling red lips and knew suddenly that he would tramp the length of the Painted Desert to be with her; but he replied coolly enough:

"Yes, of course. I don't know any one who has more time and less to do in it than a prospector who is off his job. What time shall I come, Miss Keene? Shall I make it seven-thirty?"

"That will do nicely. Good-by then for a while."

The men in the private office heard him stamp out of the room. After that came ten minutes of utter silence.

Helen spent that ten minutes in honest day-dreaming, a rare enough indulgence for her. She was practical and eminently sensible, but now— How her heart leaped at the thought that there on the office desk in that little chunk of yellow bullion lay the earnest of all her hopes.

She had never dreamed of wealth as a possibility. She had studied stenography and had made her living by it in New York till the warning had come that her mother could not stand the chill breezes of the East. After that they had come to Los Angeles and then—Palo Verde. This— Why,

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even if Mr. Hardin were right and there should be no more than just that one golden brick it would mean comparative luxury for them both—her mother and herself. Tweny-four pounds of gold—and Mr. Hardin had said the brick weighed that much—with gold at twenty dollars an ounce would be more than seven thousand dollars!

AFTER the first flush of delight came a thought for poor old Benjamin Jewett, and her lovely eyes clouded a little as she gazed unseeingly out of the window. Forty years of that terrible desert life, he had told her; and then, when he had found his fortune, to have had no time in which to enjoy it!

How well she remembered the day three months before when, trembling with his disappointment, he had come from his interview with Darke and Wettin in the inner office. He had asked them to grubstake him once more and he had met a cold refusal. They thought he was too old and that his mind was failing and Darke, with all the innate cruelty of which he was capable when in a position to practise it, had seemed to take pleasure in flinging what he thought was the truth in the old man's face. Jewett had come out trembling with ire.

"I'll find some one, sis," he said as he passed her desk. "I'll find somebody who will risk a hundred dollars on the biggest gamble in the world. This world ain't all fools."

He had almost spat out the last words.

Her response had been quick, impulsive. She had often since that day thought that she had been too impulsive, but she knew that many a fortune had been made in the West by just such a gamble. Was not the Comstock Lode discovered by a peon kicking a loose stone down a hillside? Was not the Broad Arrow found by a random rifle-shot fired at a tin can?

Who was this Mr. Hardin who was now her partner in the bequest that Benjamin Jewett had made? She had heard his name somewhere but to save her life she could not say where.

The door behind her opened quickly and Darke came into the office. The bullion brick, gleaming dully in the sunlight as it lay on the desk, caught his eye. Quite as if he knew nothing about it he picked it up and examined it.

"Hello! What's this you've got, Miss Keene?"

"I made an investment about three months ago," said Helen quietly, "and that bullion is the first ore from my claim. What do you think of it, Mr. Darke? Is it good gold?"

He hefted it, balanced it in his hand, scratched it with his knife and turned it over. His face was a study as he turned quickly to the door.

"Wettin—oh, Julius! Come here a minute——"

There was that in his voice that brought Mr. Wettin quickly. He took the brick from Darke's outstretched hand.

"What do you make of that?"

There was a curious note in Darke's voice that Helen had never heard before.

"What does that curious greenish tint mean, Wettin?"

Still Wettin stood like a statue, turning the brick over and over in his hand.

"French Creek gold's red," he mused. "Pure gold is light yellow. Green might be— Look at the fire-blisters on it—and the red sand sticking to the ore.

"Very crudely smelted, but even an amateur doesn't let red sand lie in his crucible. And the heat that melts gold melts sand. It takes two thousand degrees of heat to melt gold and no sand'll stand that——"

He stood and pondered the question, looking not at the gold brick but at a few specks of the ruby-like red sand that he had scraped loose with his knife and that lay in the palm of his yellow hand, winking evilly at him like the red eyes of a rat.

Helen stood watching him intently. She was sure that something unforeseen would develop from this. It did.

"Where did you get this ore, Miss Keene?"

"It is the first bullion from a vein in which I am interested."

"Where is it located?" asked Darke quickly.

Helen laughed, her white teeth gleaming.

"You wouldn't be interested in knowing that," she laughed.

Wettin flushed and glanced at her. Darke, unheeding, spoke again.

"Oh, look here, Miss Helen! Ain't we been square with you? Didn't we hire you as a typewriter when nobody else in Palo Verde wanted one?

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"Ain't we always paid you good wages? Ain't you always had a good job with us? That was because we knowed—knew—your mother wasn't right strong," he added virtuously.

"Do you mean that my place has been a charity job?" demanded Helen viciously. "And do you mean that I haven't given you value received in my work?"

"He doesn't mean that at all, Miss Keene," cut in Wettin coolly. "All that he means is that we have found by experience that the discovery of a vein such as produced this—" he swung the brick up and down—"is bound to make a big stir in mining circles and that he hopes—we both hope—that you feel you can give us a little information that will put us too on the inside, so that we can participate in the output."

"Thank you. You have put it very much more nicely than Mr. Darke. I already have a partner."

"Now that ain't fair," broke in Darke again, unheeding Wettin's upraised hand. "We've been payin' you— Why, right now you're livin' in one of our houses——"

"And I am paying you fifty dollars a month for a house that you can't find another tenant for," said Helen bitterly. "Don't be under any illusions, Mr. Darke, and don't think for a moment that I am under any.

"You are paying me the lowest wages you can pay me to keep me. I am not bound to you by any feelings of loyalty, for I have seen a good deal of your methods. For once you have overreached yourselves. The very man you refused to grubstake three months ago gave me this——"

SHE stopped suddenly. She had not meant to say so much. She did not suspect that they had overheard her talk with Tom Hardin before he had left the office, but she was sorry that she had been tempted to speak at all.

"Ben Jewett? Do you mean him?"

"Yes——"

She hesitated a little.

"Now that wasn't hardly fair, Miss Helen——"

"Why not? You had refused to grubstake him."

Wettin again held up his hand for silence.

"Will you let me analyze a little of this gold, Miss Keene?" he asked slowly.

She handed him the brick.

"Take off enough to test. I want to take the brick home with me."

Wettin filed away at it till a little heap of fine gold-dust lay on the paper, a tiny cloud of greenish-yellow particles, among which nested perhaps a dozen of the tiny particles of the red sand. He had been very careful as to that.

Helen gathered up her papers and picked up the lump of bullion. It was too heavy to be carried easily, but neither Darke nor Wettin offered to carry it for her. They were already on their way to Wettin's office.

No sooner was the door closed on the departing girl than Darke flung himself into a chair and watched his partner, who instantly dived for his experiment table by the west window. For an hour no word was spoken. Then Wettin turned to the big desk where Darke was sitting hunched up, his chin cupped in his hand, staring at him.

"Well?"

"It's—" Wettin let go his breath in a great gasp that told how great was the pressure under which he had been working—"it's the —— thing I have ever seen——"

"Why? What do you mean?"

"That bullion was never smelted from any common ore——"

"Of course it is. No common ore, though. I grant you that. It's blamed good ore. It must be smelted from ordinary ore——"

"Common sense says that, but all the same it isn't! That bullion is synthetic gold——"

"You mean alloy——"

"I don't mean any such thing! I mean that it is as pure gold as we have ever handled. I'm not quite certain what gives it the greenish tint. I've my own idea, but it isn't supported by science. The whole thing— I tell you, man, it is the purest gold that I have ever seen, and it is synthetic gold——"

The man was fairly quivering with excitement, and Darke caught fire from him.

"But it ain't sense," he shouted. "It ain't sense, Julius. Think of what you're sayin'."

"I know. I can't think of anything else. I know blamed well it ain't sense, but I tell you I'm right. I tell you right now that that old fool Ben Jewett either made that gold himself or else he was dealing with some one else who made it and who knows how——"

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"But it's impossible. It can't be done."

"It was impossible," said Wettin.

The quiver in his voice belied his quietness.

"It was always considered impossible, but that was many hundred years ago. Who knows what may have happened since——"

"She can't tell us where the claim is because she don't know herself where it is," said Darke suddenly.

"That man Hardin who was here to see her is to take the papers to her house at seven-thirty tonight."

"Yes. An' it is good an' dark by seven."

"M-m! These streets are mighty bad after dark."

"I wonder if Jim Sydnor's still in town. He still owes us seven hundred dollars on his claim. His note was due yesterday."

Not another word was spoken, but what had been said was quite enough to make it a problem whether or not Tom Hardin would deliver to Helen Keene at seven-thirty that night, as he had promised, the papers and charts of old Benjamin Jewett, desert-rat, deceased.

III

SWINGING out of the saddle at the door of the one little hotel that Palo Verde boasted, Tom was hailed heartily by the proprietor, Jerry Wolver, who beamed at him from across a fly-blown cigar-case.

"Where you in from, Tom?"

"Here an' there. What's new, Jerry?"

"Baby over to Newman's. Want to see it?"

Tom voiced a bachelor's opinions on babies.

"How long'll you be here?"

"Can't tell yet. Got a bed for me?"

"You kin use it fer a bed fer yourself er a feed fer the burro. The pony won't eat it."

"Good. How about some eats?"

"Man, I've got the finest line of air-tights an' Mexican *tortillas* you ever tasted. I got me a new greaser cook."

"What'd she do before she come here to cook?" demanded Tom suspiciously.

"I don't know. Why?"

"I bet you I can tell you. Bring on the grub."

While the food was being placed on the table Tom unslung his pack and heaped it behind the counter. In five minutes he was seated before a barricade of *enchiladas*, *frijoles* and thin *tortillas* flanked by a great pot of black coffee. A fat Mexican woman bobbed an embarrassed greeting to him in answer to his salutation.

Jerry watched him roll a *tortilla* into a big scoop and fill it full of beans. No sooner had Tom filled his mouth with the mixture than Jerry cried:

"Name it now, son! You said you could do it. Now do it!"

"What?"

Tom looked at him astounded.

"When I said I had a new cook you said you could call the turn on what she done before she begun cookin'. Do it. What was her job?"

Tom hesitated, looked at the woman, then glanced out of the window and announced positively:

"She had a job weavin' Navajo blankets to sell to tourists—an' she carded the wool herself. Ask her if you don't believe me."

Jerry, astounded, shot the question at her in the vernacular. She nodded and looked at Tom with startled eyes.

"She says she won't stay in the room with you; you got the Evil Eye. How'd you guess it, boy?"

"I didn't have to guess. It was a sure thing. The *tortilla* told me. A Mexican always pats a *tortilla* out with her hand to flatten it. They never wash their hands from the day they're born. The tortilla always keeps the taste of the last thing the hand was busy with. Those *tortillas* tasted like mutton chops. I knew she couldn't have been herdin' sheep, so she must have been weavin' blankets——"

"All that ain't tellin' me where you came from," growled the disconcerted Mr. Wolver.

"Jerry, how long've you lived in Palo Verde?"

"Well—I been here a matter o' six years. I reckon out o' that time you might say I've lived two years. I've only existed sense the —— place went dry."

"Know Darke & Wettin?"

"Like a rabbit knows a rattlesnake."

"What kind of people are they?"

"They ain't people. Darke's so crooked that a dog couldn't bite him twice on the same side without turnin' round. Had any dealin's with 'em?"

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"Not me. I ain't aimin' to either. They've got a pretty typewriter workin' for 'em."

"M-m. They have so. Miss Keene. She's as fine a lady as I've seen, too. She brung her old mother up here fer her health.

"You know how them lungers are; never have anything really the matter with 'em—just come 'cause their lungs is weak. She's been here 'most a year now. You don't find one girl like her in a thousand."

An unreserved compliment from Jerry Wolver was a compliment indeed and Tom knew it. He knew that Jerry saw much and told little, and he knew that he could be trusted.

"I've got a little package that I wish you'd lock up for me, Jerry. Got a good safe?"

"Good enough fer me. It'll hold that bag o' dust you got," said the grinning Jerry.

"Dust? I've got no dust."

"Nuggets then. You've about twenty pounds of ore in your left saddle-bag. Why, man, you was plumb lopsided when you come in, walkin' like a crab."

Tom grinned.

"Have it your own way; only lock it up for me. Give me some paper, Jerry; I want to write a letter in my room."

Secure in his room, with the flimsy door locked and the blind pulled down, Tom took out the little note-book that Jewett had given him. It was very soiled and dirty and thumb-marked. Nearly every page bore some kind of entry such as:

25 bacon. Mity salt went rannced. See Pullen about this.

Shipped 600 ore from Lost Jennie. She may come back.

Dead Burro claim: From an iren bolt in a rock by the spring go 500 steps North Est to a pinin pine. This is a corner—It's got the four cuts. Go North 48 paces to a V rock; then North eighty two West 200 paces to a stump with three nales in it; then South 48 West 200 feet to the place of beginning. This is the claim. It ain't been filed me not knowin' the range or section.

Tom read this very carefully, committing it to memory. Then he very painstakingly copied it and found a footnote on the last page. It said:

In the middle of the Dead Burro claim there is a spring of salt water below a fresh spring. Go North twenty steps from the Salt spring then turn to the West and go sixty-one steps (short ones if you can) then turn due North and measure seven steps and you will find it. I put all of it in a can.

TOM puzzled long over this footnote. He felt certain that Ben Jewett would not have wasted literary effort over a valueless note. It meant something of course, but he could not guess what it was. Finally he copied the footnote and placed both papers with a copy of Jewett's will in an envelope, which he placed in his pocket. The originals he tied carefully in a towel, which he took to the office where Jerry Wolver was waiting for him.

"Here you are Jerry! Lock 'em up! Take as good care of 'em as if they were your two last teeth. Where does Miss Helen Keene live?"

"Don't know, do you? Ain't you the cute young masher? Well, if you must know, she lives in the green house at the far end of the street on the other side. Remember—the green house."

Tom looked out into the black street.

"They're all the same color tonight. The last house, you said?"

"Aye. I'll set up fer you, Tom. Here's a duplicate key of the safe."

"All right. The state bein' dry, you might open up a bottle of prime old vanilla extract when I get back."

Jerry chuckled and closed the door after his guest, for the night was cold with the chill of the desert; and Tom Hardin strode off into the night.

Nearly always Arizona nights are cold. The moment Night wraps her blue mantle over the valleys the beetling hills send down the breath of the gods, which is a cold breath.

This particular night was no exception, and Tom's breath drew cold in his nostrils as he headed across the plaza before the hotel. The street was empty and the plaza was bounded on the far side by a low adobe wall, buttressed in places, the clay abutments throwing black shadows abroad in the dark-blue night.

There were no street lights. Why should there be? All Palo Verde went to bed at eight o'clock to make the most of the cold hours for sleeping.

Once Tom stumbled over a tin can. As it rolled away over the rocks its clang sounded like a tocsin bell.

Besides making him swear it acted magically upon the black blur of a buttress that held up the wall. A part of the lengthening shadows seemed to move out from the wall,

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and in the cool night air there sounded a low whirring noise, such a low humming as might be made by a June bug on the end of a string.

Tom halted.

The figure squatted and the humming ceased. The prospector scratched a match on the leg of his trousers. The stick broke. He swore and struck another.

This time the flame caught and he lit his cigaret. For a brief second the glare in his eyes blinded him. In that brief second something happened.

Again there came the low whirring noise and Tom felt something settle about his neck. For a thousandth part of a second he felt it—then the whole world crashed into a sheet of breaking sparks that sprang from his bursting eyeballs and popped inward in jets of flame and many-hued lights like catherine-wheels.

Came a sudden grip and jarring pull at his throat that shut off all breath and thought. The leaping soul seemed straining to be freed, and his clutching hands clawed instinctively at his throat as something heavy drove down his thick felt hat; something that fell with remorseless force and that sent him prone into the roadway, an unconscious, insert mass of quivering flesh.

A man bent over him.

"It was like ropin' a calf," he chortled. "Give me a hair rope every time. Lend a hand here, Pedro. Don't show a light. Quick now——"

A second blur sprang to his assistance. The man drove his hand rapidly into pocket after pocket of Tom's clothing, while the Mexican stood by, taking what the white man passed over to him.

"Never mind the money. We ain't exactly thieves, Pedro. We ain't out this time fer cash. It's only papers we're after—Ah! Here they are!"

His eager hands clutched the long envelope that Tom had so carefully sealed in his room. With a muttered curse the man switched on an electric torch and hid the light in the tall crown of his sombrero. The little flicker of light disclosed only his mouth and nose, grotesque, like *Cyrano de Bergerac*, in the distorting light.

"All right! Come on! Before he comes to and can see us——"

The two men scuttled away and were swallowed up in the night.

FOR perhaps ten minutes Tom Hardin lay there, sprawling all about the road. Then his breath grew deeper and deeper and he rolled over once. His eyes opened and closed rapidly. He raised a hand to his throat, struggled once or twice and then sat up.

His eyeballs ached and stung and his neck felt as if it had been encircled by a red-hot wire. Also, his neck having been very nearly dislocated, intense pains shot along every nerve and muscle of his neck and back and shoulders.

"What in ——?"

He sat up; then struggled to his feet in the darkness and staggered along drunkenly for a few paces. Finally he leaned against the wall that edged the plaza.

"Roped an' knocked out! Let's sit down for a bit. Whew! Now who did that? We're getting as civilized as New York——"

The surprize of it gripped him. Except for Jerry Wolver he did not know a soul in Palo Verde. Who could it be who had held him up and—for what?

He quickly drove his hand into pocket after pocket. What little money he had was there. So too was his gold watch.

A sudden thought bade him feel for the long envelope. It was gone!

He backed up against the end of the wall and stood for a moment deep in thought. This was worse than he could have believed. Fortunately the stolen papers were but copies but—who was there who knew of their existence at all?

Well—he had promised Miss Keene to show her those papers that night. He had still time to go to his room for the originals. Fortunately Jerry had given him a duplicate key of the safe in which he had locked the papers so he would not be asked any inconvenient questions.

There was no one in the hotel office so he got his papers from the safe and, pausing only long enough to go to his room where he got his gun, he walked back to the street.

"If they try it again they'll get a bellyful," he growled, his hand trying the comfortable feel of his pistol-grip as it nestled in the waist-band of his trousers. It is only in fiction that the hero carries a gun in the orthodox holster, which is a device of the devil to lure men to an untimely end. It takes time on the draw, when time is most valuable.

Tom passed the scene of his late hold-up with his hand half-shut to grasp his gun

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again. Half-unbelieving, wholly stiff and sore, he moved off down the street till he came to the last house. A light shone in the sitting-room and the door opened quickly in answer to his knock. Helen was waiting for him.

"I had begun to give up in despair," she began.

Then she caught sight of his face and started back in astonishment.

"Good gracious, Mr. Hardin! What has happened?"

Two years before she might have sniffed suspiciously at a man who was in like case, with hat and clothes dusty and a raw red line about the neck, with a smear of blood on the right cheek. She knew better, but was not prepared for Tom's laughter. It was very shaken laughter.

"That's all right, Miss Keene, as long as it isn't what you think it is. I haven't had a drop. At least the drop I had wasn't the kind of a drop that you've been thinking of. I was on my way here when some one dropped a lariat over my head and knocked me out. A genuine knock-out in the most approved New York style. It's a disgrace to Arizona——"

"Come in. Sit down there. Let me get you something——"

"Never mind me, Miss Keene. After what has happened it was more necessary than ever that I should see you at once. Don't you understand? Let me tell you what happened."

He told her all that he knew of the attack upon him, which was little enough, and how his pocketbook and watch had been let alone but the copies of his papers had been stolen.

"The attack on me was prompted, of course, by some one who knew that I had the papers that Ben Jewett gave me. Now I don't know a soul here in Palo Verde except you and Jerry Wolver at the hotel, yet some one knew about these papers and knew of them in time to plan a hold-up. Who was it? That is the question."

"Mr. Darke and Mr. Wettin saw the gold you brought me," said Helen suddenly. "They questioned me about it. They found out too from me that the gold had been sent me by Mr. Jewett. They might have heard our talk——"

"But surely they couldn't—they wouldn't——"

She leaned forward, her lovely eyes alight, her mouth set. "I tell you, Mr. Hardin, I don't believe there is very much that Mr. Darke at least would stop at if it would pay him cent per cent. Mr. Wettin I believe is just a scientist who lives in his books, but Darke is—Darke. What do you think about the affair?"

"Why this: Some one—we'll say Darke—found out that I had in my possession important papers relating to Jewett's claim. He knew that the claim has never been filed on yet and heard that I was to bring the papers to you tonight. So he had me knocked out and stole the papers——"

"Were they really very important then? You say the claim had not been filed——"

"No. Jewett could not file his claim till he knew the range and the section where it lay. He could not give a correct description of it to the surveyor. That is why those papers are important.

"Of course they were only copies. They will not help the thief at all; that is one comfort."

"Why will they not help him? You say they describe the place."

"Oh yes—" Tom grinned at her cheerfully—"they do that. Any one with those papers could locate the claim if they were in the right cañon——"

"Well——"

Helen was frankly puzzled.

"Well, don't you see, they can't find the right cañon. The range of hills runs for a hundred miles across the desert. There are at least two hundred cañons, any of which might be the one. Jewett told me what cañon it is in, but no one else knows.

"They can skin their shins among those rocky ledges for a thousand years and be none the wiser. I do think, though, Miss Keene, that we should do something and do it at once to forestall trouble. We ought to locate that claim and file on it at once so we can not be ousted or have some one jump it."

"What do you think of Jewett's claim, Mr. Hardin?"

"Frankly, at first I thought old Benjamin Jewett with his Old-World tale of the Mother Lode was as crazy as a loon. I still feel sure that he was touched in the head, but I believe that he struck some wonderfully rich pay-dirt and that he got a lot of ore.

"There may or may not be more there. He says there was a lot more. His tale may or may not be true."

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"Where was the place?"

"In the southwestern part of the Painted Desert."

HELEN got out a huge map of Arizona and together they pored over it, their heads very close together. Coming in a little later, Mrs. Keene found them leaning over the map as intent as children over a new game.

She gave an exclamation of surprize at Tom's appearance and could with difficulty be prevented from swathing him in bandages. Helen had told her of Jewett's bequest and the old lady was as excited as a child.

Presently Helen raised her eyes to Tom's. Her finger still marked the place they had last located and her face was eager.

"I have a plan. Listen. It may not be feasible, but it is a plan that we can carry out, I am sure.

"I have been planning for my vacation for a month. Mother is to stay here. The day after tomorrow I am to start for the Grand Cañon, where I am to meet a friend of mine, Mrs. Hazen, who is coming there from Chicago.

"Now it is very plain that you can not go alone to that claim. If you should go there and locate the claim and come back to file its description, those people might get in ahead of you. The claim must be located and the one hundred dollars worth of work necessary to hold it for a year must be done before we leave it.

"That gives it to us. Nobody can jump it. You will have to stay on the claim, Mr. Hardin——"

Her eyes were gleaming.

"Yes."

Tom caught fire at the flame of her enthusiasm.

"Go on——"

"Don't you see? I have a good friend here—Mr. Boyce—Peter Boyce. He used to be a guide in the Grand Cañon years ago. You get your outfit, leave here and be on the north side of the Grand Cañon on a certain day. I will go on to the Grand Cañon, meet Mrs. Hazen there and with Mr. Boyce will cross the Cañon and meet you on the north side.

"Then we can go on to the place. We will locate the claim. Then, while you stay there for a week or so, we will bring the papers back and file the claim——"

"It will be an awful trip for you, Miss Keene. It will take at least a week from the time we leave till the time we can possibly start back. It will mean a three weeks' trip——"

"I have a month's vacation," said Helen. "Is that the only objection you can find to it?"

"It is a lonely rôle you have given Mr. Hardin, my dear."

Tom grinned cheerfully.

"Never mind that, Mrs. Keene. If we make our pile out of this I'll never be lonely again."

"What do you think of the plan?" demanded Helen.

"It's by long odds the best that could be framed," he said heartily. "Who is this Peter Boyce and where can I see him? Is he to be trusted?"

"I will send him to see you the first thing in the morning. You can trust him implicitly."

"All right then."

Tom thrust out his hand and seized her fingers in a warm grasp.

"I'll shake hands with my new partner. And now I must be going," he said regretfully as he rose and took his hat.

"Oh, no! Now that we have had our business talk and have settled the affair of the mine let's get to really know each other as all good partners should."

So down he sat and talked, or rather he sat and Helen talked in her full, rich voice, of everything under Heaven: Music, which she found out he loved—after which there was an hour at the worn little piano—art, for Tom was not altogether a Philistine and had known the galleries before he had known the lure of the West. So it was midnight when he rose to bid her good night. He had not had such an evening for years.

"I'll see you tomorrow—no; I mean today—and tell you definitely about the arrangements. Do not forget to send Mr. Boyce to see me. I'd like to see him at the earliest hour I can."

He found his way back to the hotel, where Jerry was waiting for him. To him Tom said not a word of what had happened, and Jerry did not ask. After a drink of something that was certainly not vanilla extract he went to his room and in twenty minutes was dead to the world and its troubles.

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IV

OBED DARKE had gone straight to his rooms after getting his supper at a Chinese restaurant and was waiting for his partner. The rooms were typical of the man; a bedroom into which a little bathroom opened, with a sitting-room in front. The paper label still stuck to the bottom of the bathtub, which had been installed nearly a year before. It was a little unpainted house, whose galvanized iron roof made it hot enough in Summer to bake bread in.

On this particular night a great oil lamp smoked and stank on a table. In the reek of it Darke sat stolidly smoking a black pipe.

A little later Wettin drifted in; a gray shadow. Darke looked up and nodded morosely.

"Got here all right, did you? Sydnor should show up in a little. I told him——"

Wettin held up a restraining hand.

"You have told me nothing of your plans," he said coldly. "I have asked you nothing and you have told me nothing. Neither of us knows anything—nothing at all. It is safest that way."

Darke grinned sheepishly.

"Have it your own way. But if I know Sydnor—and I think I do—we'll both of us know something before we're much older. While we wait, Wettin, tell me more about that gold that the Keene girl had."

"Good Lord! What more is there to tell you? I wish to Heaven she had left the entire brick with me. I'd have given it back to her all right."

Wettin told the cold truth. He personally would have given the gold back to her; but if it had ever passed through Darke's hands it would have changed miraculously and Helen would have been the poorer.

"You must have been mistaken in your estimate of it," began Darke.

Wettin, scientist to the backbone, took fire instantly.

"That's right. Disbelieve anything that you don't happen to have seen in your own little life. I'll bet my reputation as a chemist and assayer that I am right.

"The —— of it is that we can't submit it to any outside person to analyze because it would give the whole thing away. Man, it would set the mining world afire!"

"You said it was synthetic gold?" said the unbelieving Darke.

"I did and I do," said Wettin grimly. "And I say it again. I mean just that. Synthetic gold. Gold made by artificial means—at least—" a queer, speculative look came into his eyes—"gold that he either made himself or found out how to make. That old Ben Jewett made it, I will never believe; but I do believe that he has stumbled upon a great secret."

"Smelted in secret, you mean, by some secret process?"

"I do not mean smelted. I mean made—and—made."

"Gold is an element," began Darke obstinately. "It can't be made."

"Aye! That's what Berzelius said. Stick to it! St. Augustine said the earth was flat and was held up by four elephants at the corners; and the world believed him till some fool scientist asked what the elephants stood on."

"Think of what you're sayin'!" said Darke hotly. "You talk like a fool, Julius."

"I know it. I have thought of nothing else since I tested that sample that I took from Miss Keene's ore. What is that?"

A man was hurring along the street outside. His heavy footfalls clumped on the packed earth. Palo Verde had no sidewalks. The two partners sat staring at each other, Darke sitting poised, a hand on each arm of his chair.

"That's him. I know his step. That's Sydnor——"

A heavy hand at the door nearly drove in a panel. Wettin called—

"Come in."

Darke licked his dry lips. The door pushed open and a man entered.

"Hello, Sydnor. What luck?"

Sydnor grinned evilly at them. He was a burly brute of a man, as square-shouldered as if hewn from granite. His nose showed the predatory lines of a bird of prey; his cold gray eyes, which looked as if they were covered with a gray film, glinted dully.

As he stood he occasionally smote his goat-skin "chaps" with his hat, the gray dust swirling about him in little spurts. A heavy pistol hung low on his right hip and he carried a hair rope coiled in his hand.

"Any luck?" asked Darke.

"When I go fer a thing I generally git it," Sydnor chuckled.

He fumbled for a moment in the breast of his dirty shirt and finally produced a long

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envelope. At sight of it Darke and Wettin became visibly excited.

"It was like ropin' a calf," he chuckled. "They oughtn't to allow yearlin's to run loose like that."

Darke held out his hand for the envelope, but Sydnor drew back a pace.

"I want my pay first," he said grimly. "You got a bad memory, Mr. Darke. I've done business with you before, you know.

"I found these here papers. If you want 'em you'll have to pay me well for 'em."

"Haven't I told you that we'll cancel that note of yours?"

"You did so. Let me have the note. Better add another three hundred in cold cash to it while you're about it, just to make it an even thousand."

Darke swore.

"This is a simple hold-up."

"Think so?" began Sydnor sweetly. "Talkin' of hold-ups, wasn't that what you was payin' me for? Take it or leave it. It don't matter none to me. Maybe I kin make that much out of the papers myself."

"What the —— do you know about the papers?" demanded Darke.

"Well now—" laughed the genial scoundrel outright at the disconcerted Darke—"you surely don't think I'd pick up a bunch of papers on a dark street without lookin' at 'em, do you? I know well enough what them papers are. Maybe I know a little more'n you think I do. I ain't sayin' no to that.

"Take it or leave it. I play her as she lays."

"But I haven't got three hundred dollars in the house."

"Give me a check. If you stop it on me I'll squeal. Of course that'll git me in bad, but I kin make up a yarn that'll hold water.

"How would it be if I was to make affidavit, supported by my man Pedro, that we was walkin' along the street in Palo Verde when we seen a hold-up? We seen a man knocked out, an' we stepped in just in time to keep the man from bein' robbed of his papers. We got the papers to prove it, you know! The man'll be glad enough to get 'em."

Darke hastily scribbled a check for three hundred dollars.

"This clears us then," he said angrily.

"An' the note."

DARKE thrust the note out to him viciously, as if he hoped it would sting him. Sydnor seized it, tore it into fragments and threw them on the floor.

"That's done with."

He pouched the check.

"Now just one thing more, Mr. Darke. That claim described in them papers must be an all-fired good one to make you take such chances. I reckon I'll set in on the deal. What say? You-all can put up the cash an' I'll do the work."

Wettin cleared his throat loudly. The interruption probably saved Darke from a stroke of apoplexy. Then they both realized their predicament and were frankly puzzled.

They did not see how they could refuse. The scoundrel Sydnor held all the cards in his hand, and they knew him well enough to know that he would play them intelligently.

Then too they would certainly need someone to do the work for them. But—could they trust Sydnor? He would steal if he got the chance but they could tie his interests up with theirs so that he could not steal from them. If Sydnor had been honest Darke would never have consented, but as it was he had no alternative.

"All right, Sydnor."

Wettin spoke.

"We'll take you in on the thing, you to have one-sixth interest. We will have five-sixths and will put up all the cash."

"Put it on paper," said Sydnor quickly.

Wettin shook his head.

"Not a line of it. You'll be on the ground all the time and can protect your own interests. If I can even guess a thing about the value of the affair there'll be more than enough for us all. Are you satisfied?"

"I'll be —— if I am," declared Sydnor frankly. "But I ain't a hog. And I ain't a-goin' to upset the trough just because I can't get the whole mash. Only I'll say this—" he glared at them—"I'm aimin' to play a straight hand with you-all from now on in this crooked mess—as straight a hand as you two crooks'll let me. God help you if you double-cross me. That's all."

"Let's see the papers," said Darke hoarsely.

Sydnor laid them on the table. Wettin tore them from the envelope and pored over them long and earnestly. He gave

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them up very grudgingly to Darke, who grinned openly.

"We've got the whole layout," he said presently. "Every step counted off and every bearing given. It's as plain as a pike-staff. I guess that's a rotten deal, hey?"

"Where is it?" demanded Wettin coolly.

"Why—why, he says six hundred paces from the iron bolt up the cañon——"

"Aye. So he does. Up which cañon? Answer me that. Up which cañon? There can't be less than a thousand cañons in the Kaibab Range."

Darke looked at him with a frankly puzzled expression, Sydnor grinning evilly the while.

"It looks to me as if we are as much at sea as we were before we got the papers," pursued Wettin. "He tells us all about the location of the claim except the cañon that it is in. We can't test every cañon. It would take a lifetime and several fortunes. What're you grinning at, Sydnor?"

"You-all," said Sydnor frankly. "You may be good business men, but out in the plains your heads wouldn't be much good to you but to hang your hats on. Jewett's dead, ain't he?"

"I don't know. He's been buried."

"How do you know it?"

"A man named Hardin came into our office and told our stenographer so. Hardin buried him."

"We can back-trail Hardin then and find the grave. From there on we can locate the cañon easy enough. There'll be signs of fires an' grazin' an' lots of trail-sign that'll tell us where Jewett was. If that don't work——"

"Go on."

"Well then, if that won't work we kin charge Hardin with havin' killed old Jewett fer his bullion. He'll have to show where he buried him, so a coroner kin investigate the body. That's two ways.

"There's another an' a better way still, an' that is to foller Hardin. These papers haven't been writ very long. It looks like they're only copies. He's probably got the originals. If he has, he'll set to work to find the claim by the original papers.

"Well—we'll foller him, let him locate his claim and then when he comes in to file on it we'll settle ourselves on it. When he comes back he'll find us there with our hundred dollars' worth of work done. That'll hold the claim for us. See?"

"That's the best plan of all," said Wettin judicially. "After that if there should be any trouble made about the affair we can charge him openly with the murder of old Jewett. Of course he can't be convicted of it, but it will keep him out of the way for six or eight months. In that time we can either be fixed for life or we will have found that there is nothing in it.

"It's settled then. Sydnor, you keep your eye on this man Hardin. Don't let him get out of your sight. Where did he go tonight after you—er—saw him?"

"I didn't wait to see," said Mr. Sydnor frankly enough. "I reckon he went back to the hotel. That's what I'd have done if I'd had a hair riata about my gizzard; I'd git home as quick as I could. I know that."

He rose and strolled to the door.

"I'll watch him then an' keep you posted on what he does an' where he goes."

He slammed the door behind him and they heard him whistling himself homeward through the dark streets, like a negro after dark.

"A confounded scoundrel," growled Wettin. "He has simply held us up. Worse than he held up Hardin! Well—we'll see! There's more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream. We're not yet done with our new partner. I wonder where he has gone now?"

Sydnor had gone to the street before the hotel. Seeing no sign of Tom, he went to a back alley, where he found Pedro, to whom he confided facts that set the Mexican to watching Tom's pony as a weasel watches a new-laid egg.

As a matter of fact, by the time Sydnor had seen his partners and they had perfected their business arrangements Tom had come home from Helen Keene's and had gone to bed.

VERY early in the morning a thundering knock on his door set it to trembling on its hinges. Half-blinded with sleep, Tom stumblingly opened it.

"Half-past five o'clock an' not up yit! A —— of a mountain man you air!"

An old man pushed past him into the room, closed the door and sat down on the bed.

"Le' me see what you look like," he said coolly. "Le' me see how you stack up. M'm!"

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"Who the dickens are you?" demanded Tom heatedly.

"Ne' mind that. No time fer that now. All o' five foot ten, ain't you? Kin you shoot?"

"Yes."

Tom grinned in spite of himself.

"Say you kin, eh? Maybe you'll have to. Well now, I come over to tell you——"

"See here! I want to know who you are," demanded Tom not unreasonably.

"Miss Helen sent me over. She said, 'See Mr. Hardin and give him this note.' I had to see you first, didn't I?"

"Is your name Boyce?" demanded Tom in sudden enlightenment.

"Bull's-eye at the first shot. Boyce's part o' my name. First name's Peter. That means a rock, a stone; me bein' a prospector. See?

"I dunno jest what the Boyce part means. If you ask me, why sometimes I think the Boyce part means just plain —— fool. Anyway Miss Helen told me to see you."

Suddenly his entire manner changed, the light carelessness dropping from him as one sheds a coat.

"See here, Hardin. Miss Helen told me the whole layout. Do you know what you're goin' up against?"

Tom looked at him astounded.

"No," he said frankly. "I don't. Do you?"

"I mean that from what Miss Helen told me, I size it up that old Ben Jewett had stumbled on to somethin' mighty good. He died and left it to Miss Helen and to you. She works for Darke & Wettin—the crookedest pair in the West, I'll bet. Nobody but you and Miss Helen and them partners knows about Ben Jewett bein' dead.

"All of a sudden you're roped an' knocked out an' have the Jewett papers stole from you. Whoever done it, Darke & Wettin egged 'em on. I'll bet on that, but we can't prove it. If they've got the papers they won't stop at that.

"Miss Helen sent for me last night after you left her house. I owe that girl a whole lot.

"I got a little granddaughter that would ha' been a cripple but fer Miss Helen. She made me send the kid to a child's hospital in Los Angeles and she went along with her an' nursed her an' took keer of her all right! That's got nothin' to do with the case in court.

"Miss Helen told me her plan an' it listens good. She's leavin' by this mornin's stage for Wells. From Wells she'll go on to Eston an' Dry Fork an' hit in for the railroad at Williams. If all goes right she'll be in Grand Cañon next Wednesday——"

"Fine! Go on."

Tom was openly excited.

"So far it's all right," Mr. Boyce nodded. "I'm goin' to head south this mornin'. When I'm out of sight I'll hit fer the stage-line an' Miss Helen'll pick me up an' I'll go on to the Grand Cañon with her——"

"All right. It gets better and better. What next?"

"You'll see it all in a minute. I used to be a guide at the Grand Cañon in the days when men were needed there—not burros. We-all will arrange to go down into the cañon on Saturday and spend the night down there. We'll send everybody back but Miss Helen, Mrs. Hazen—a friend of hers that's goin' along—and me.

"Your job is to get an outfit together here an' beat it along the north side of the Grand Cañon so as to be there next Sunday week. I'll bring 'em across the valley—I've done it before.

"We'll meet you on the Rim Rock an' we'll pull out fer the place you know of. Kin you do it?"

His gray eyes twinkled like crums of glass and his gnarled hands capped his knees as he carefully scrutinized Tom.

"You've sure got a man's-sized job, son," he went on. "You'll need at least four burros to carry our grub an' all the stuff them women'll need. Kin you cross the Big Colorado?"

"Sure. I've done it twice."

"All right. I'll send my Mexican to you. He's a good boy an' he's got five likely burros. If I was you I'd make him pack the stuff over at his house an' move out by hisself. Then meet him at some place on the trail so Darke & Wettin won't know you've started. Get me?"

"Yes but— Good Heavens, Boyce, the matter is not so important as you seem to think it——"

"Think not? Well, just for luck's sake you pretend like it is and do like I tell you. It won't do no harm.

"Remember—Sunday week you be in camp on the Rim Rock about twenty miles west of Marble Cañon. Be sure to show a signal smoke—black smoke. Use wet cottonwood on the fire. *Sabe?*"

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"All right. I'll be there. But you're making an awful puzzle of a simple thing."

"That's exactly what I'm aimin' to do, son. I know that the coyotes wouldn't have robbed you unless it was for somethin' big. And if they think it's big enough to risk jail fer, you kin just about bet it *is* big. Good-by. Sunday week then on the Rim Rock."

Tom heard him clatter down the uncarpeted steps and began lazily to dress.

PETER BOYCE strolled out into the cool air of the early dawn and walked across the street, rolling a cigaret.

"Held up at the corner, Helen said," he mused. "There's the corner. An' a greaser leanin' against it—" it was Pedro.

"I got to ketch a look at that corner without that greaser seein' it. He's prob'ly set there by somebody."

He walked on slowly, furtively scrutinizing the ground as he walked. The marks of the encounter were plain enough to all who could read.

Just around the corner of the adobe wall Mr. Boyce's eyes caught sight of four circular marks in the soft dust. He paused and looked earnestly down the street.

"Them's the heels of a cow-puncher's boots—two of 'em. Might be anybody. Two of 'em was standing there last night behind that buttress.

"Now why do the heel-prints show but not the toe-prints? By gosh! I've got it! They roped him an' settled back on their heels to take up the pull.

"Hello! This here's luck! I'm developin' into a reg'lar detective."

The gleam and glitter from a round piece of tin met his gaze. Also he noticed a small brown splash on the adobe bricks near the ground.

"Somebody standin' there last night was chewin' tobacco an' it's still fresh. Greasers don't chew tobacco. All right; then two men was here—and one of 'em anyway must 'a' been a greaser. Le' me git that tag."

It lay with its serrated edge uppermost, and Mr. Boyce casually stepped upon it so that the sharp points of the upturned edge stuck in his boot-sole. Then he wandered slowly down the street and turned in at the open door of the one tobacco-store in Palo Verde where, while hopping on one foot like an aged canary, he dug the tag from his boot sole and studied the letters on it.

"Lone Hand," he said musingly. "Lone Hand! That comes like a sign all right. Say Perkins," he called. "Got any Lone Hand chawin'-tobacco?"

Perkins shook his head casually.

"I ain't got a bit. What do you want with chewin'-tobacco? You never took a chew in your life."

"Well, I ain't too old to learn, am I? I hoped you'd have some. It's a good brand."

"I would have some if that feller Sydnor hadn't bought my last plug yesterday."

"I wonder when Sydnor come to town," said Mr. Boyce in mild surprize.

"He said he came in last week. He's gettin' ready for a trip."

"Hm! Gi' me some chewin'-gum, Perkins. I got to keep my jaws loosened up."

He strolled out aimlessly enough and wandered back to the hotel. On the way the stage whirled past him in a cloud of dust. His quick old eyes noted Helen on the back seat and he waved his hand to her as she passed.

Once in the hotel he went directly to Tom's room. Tom was writing a letter at a small table.

"Well?"

He looked astounded at the old man's face.

"It ain't. It's far from well. I found out who roped you, son! It was a low-down coyote named Sydnor an' another feller—I suspect that Mexican I've seen trailing around with him."

He told Tom piece by piece what he had seen and his deductions.

"It ain't proof, of course, in a court of law, but—Sydnor did it."

"Who is Sydnor?" demanded Tom.

"If I wanted a stage held up or a man sandbagged or a horse stole," said Mr. Boyce sententiously, "I figger I wouldn't have no trouble in puttin' it over if I had the price and Sydnor was in town with no job immediately pressin'."

"Oh! I see."

"No, you don't see. An' you probably won't see neither till it drops on top of your skull, an' then it'll be too late. I'm leavin' in an hour. I got to ketch that stage.

"Be keerful, son. Remember—a black smoke on the Rim Rock twenty miles west of Marble Cañon on Sunday week. On the very lip of the Rim Rock."

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The door closed behind him and Tom heard him pass softly down the stairs.

V

AS TOM turned into the hotel dining-room he felt Jerry's eyes centered on him. As a matter of fact Jerry was scanning curiously the raw, red line that Sydnor's hair riata had made about Tom's neck. Jerry grinned.

"They sure do do it," he observed.

"What're you talkin' about?"

"Them white collars that you put on when you go girlin'. If Miss Keene could see you now she sure would laugh. Your neck looks like a raw beefsteak."

Tom grinned and refused to be drawn out.

"Who's Pete Boyce, Jerry?" he demanded.

"Pete? He used to be sheriff over in Yavapai County when she was a county. He was some sheriff too, believe me! He's all rawhide an' canvas, an' don't you fergit it. If anybody picks Pete up fer a fool he'll sure be sorry fer hisself. There was a boy here a while ago askin' fer you, Tom."

"A boy?"

"Yep. A greaser. He said you had said for him to meet you here."

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten."

Tom suddenly remembered that Mr. Boyce had said he would send his servant to see him.

"Can I see him in the office, Jerry?"

"Of course. There he is now."

A Mexican slouched into the corridor. When Tom addressed him in Spanish his eyes lighted.

"Have you a message for me?"

"*Sí, señor;* from Señor Boyce."

"What is it then?"

"He told me to come to you and to carry out your orders as if they were his own. Señor, if you are a friend of my señor I am at your service."

"Bully for you! What's your name?"

"Patricio, señor."

"'*Sta bueno!* How many burros have you, Patricio?"

"I have five, señor."

"Better and best! Mr. Boyce and his party should have their own blankets. We will need grub for five people. How much of a load can your burros pack, Patricio?"

"*Señor,* I have loaded them with two hundred pounds of ore."

"Then you overloaded them most damnably. We can pack sixty days' supplies. I don't believe it. I'll count on thirty days' stuff. Got a gun, Patricio?"

"A pistol, *señor*—but I prefer a knife."

He touched the long Albacete knife that lay in a sharkskin sheath upon his hip. While he was talking Tom was rapidly writing a list of the supplies that he knew they would need. When it was written he called Jerry into consultation.

"Just O. K. that list, will you, Jerry, and tell the storekeeper to deliver those things at once to Patricio. I'll pay you for them."

Jerry silently did as he was asked, but he looked at Tom more than once as he wrote. Tom turned to Patricio.

"You get these supplies at once, Patricio. Take 'em to your own house. Pack all of your burros and pull out for the river crossing at sunup. I'll catch up with you before the day is over. In case of any mistake you cross the Colorado Grande and keep to the eastward on to the Rim Rock. Do you need any money?"

It was a useless question to ask of any Mexican. Tom realized its folly as soon as he spoke. Patricio cupped his hands and caught the gold-piece that Tom tossed to him, then rose and swaggered out into the sunlight. Jerry Wolver turned quizzically to his friend.

"See here, you millionaire, I want to ask you a few questions. The first one is: What's up?"

"I've got a big job on, Jerry—at least Pete Boyce says it's a big order."

"If he says it is, why it is," grunted Jerry. "Feel like talkin'?"

Tom did, and in a few minutes he told Jerry all that had happened. At first Jerry did not believe, but Tom showed him the papers and called attention to the scar on his neck, which Jerry had already seen. From being skeptical Jerry turned angry, then white with suppressed feeling.

"Why didn't you come to me first of all?" he demanded.

"There was nothing to be done just then. It isn't settled yet. I'm not going to find out who the man was and then simply arrest him and have him fined a dollar. He'll pay—oh yes, he'll pay yet!"

Jerry Wolver took one long look at his friend's set face and knew that Tom spoke the truth.

"You'll have to go as carefully as if you were walkin' on eggs. You're liable

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at any moment to pick up something that's loaded."

"Jerry, do you know a man named Sydnor?"

Jerry looked at him and his hand stopped half-way to his mouth.

"Had a run-in with him?" he asked.

"No. Not yet."

"Don't have none. Sydnor's plumb pizen. You an' me and most men out here is handicapped by law and decency. Sydnor ain't. He'll stop at nothin'. What're you aimin' to do, Tom?"

Tom told him.

"You'll have a —— of a trip, as you know. There's mighty little water on the north slope of the cañon. I've got a map. Wait."

He went out and presently came back and threw on the table a couple of pages from an old Geological Survey map of the land. They pored long over them.

"Here's water." Jerry pointed to a line of broken blue dashes.

"No you don't."

Tom was wiser. He had trailed before by Government maps and knew that they told the truth. Broken water-lines mean streams that flow only occasionally. That means that while the traveler has a full canteen the creek is running; when a canteen is once emptied the creek too is dry.

"When're you aimin' to leave?"

"An hour before moonrise. I'll get my outfit ready now."

Unfortunately for the ultimate success of his plans the most important thing was to have his pony reshod. It was duly observed by an incurious Mexican who leaned against the side of the shop during the operation. An hour later that Mexican might have been seen in conference with Sydnor, whose face darkened as his companion talked.

"He'll make it alone, will he? Hasn't got anybody with him, hey? That'll simplify matters.

"Keep a watch on his horse and let me know the minute he pulls out. We'll follow him and see what's up."

Tom ate his supper and when darkness had swallowed up the hills he sauntered out to the corral, saddled his pony and led him to the back door of the hotel. A look to the filled canteen, a touch to the food-filled saddle-bags, a reassuring look to the blanket tied to the crupper, and he thrust his rifle under his leg and settled himself in the saddle.

"Good-by, Jerry. I wish I'd had that man Sydnor arrested on some trumped-up charge just to have him put away for a while, till I get clear. It's too late now. It's me for the trail."

Very carefully so that he should make no noise he smote his pony between the ears with his hat and moved out in the shadow of the street and Jerry saw him suddenly disappear in the blotting shadows of the trail.

NOW it is one thing to disappear from a little village to the west of Cataract Creek far to the south of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado and quite another thing to reappear safely on the lip of that tremendous gorge. Tom faded away from Palo Verde unheeded by any man save one.

Pedro Lopez had seen his horse being shod. Pedro had watched Tom pack his saddle and get his pony and when he finally faded away from the watching eyes of Jerry Wolver, Pedro was not twenty yards from him. Before Tom had gone two hundred yards Pedro was pulling gently at Sydnor's blanket.

"*Señor! Señor!* He has gone."

"Gone has he?"

Sydnor sat up.

"Which way did he go?"

"Northeast, *señor*. Do we follow?"

"Swing the packs. We'll foller him right off."

They had no idea where Tom was heading for. But they knew very well that to get anywhere he would have to cross the Grand Cañon; and the crossing-places were rare.

He could keep down Cataract Creek, enter the Grand Cañon and seek another exit to the north; but the Grand Cañon is a mile deep and in places it is thirteen miles across. To be sure there was no trail but a horse can go where a man can go provided the man does not use his hands. It was very certain that they must follow him closely or they would lose him entirely.

Tom headed almost straight northeast, felt for and found the lip of the cañon in the darkness, stumbled for two miles down and over it and found himself in the bottom-lands where the little creek gurgled and sank between the rocks. Overhead he could see the tips of the great trees waving

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in the night wind which, far down in the cañon-bed, he did not feel.

"Now where can that darned Patricio have got to?"

At first the question was formless in his own mind. After two miles of rocky trail he voiced it profanely.

His answer came quickly in a long hee-haw from a boulder-strewn hillside where Patricio's burros raised their voices in song. Tom rode over and hailed.

"Oh, Patricio! That you?"

"*Sí, señor.*"

The answer quavered in the dolorous whine of the Mexican peon.

Tom rode up and found Patricio already rolling up his blankets. It was evident that he had an inkling of the nature of his trip.

"In a hurry, Patricio?" Tom grinned.

"Who lingers on a trail courts a knife," quoth Patricio, quoting a proverb of his people, current on the Border in the early days.

Like most proverbs it had been originally founded on fact.

In fifteen minutes the five burros had been caught up and their packs swung; they had been tied head to tail and were headed off anew on the narrow, tortuous trail that led deep down into the dark heart of the cañon.

Mile after mile they plodded onward; onward and downward, now drifting like shadows athwart the silver moonlight, across some rock-strewn meadow dotted with oak and pine; again hanging to almost sheer walls, as the eyebrow hangs to a man's face, where none but their burros or the mountain-bred ponies could have kept a foothold.

"Pah!"

Tom wiped the streaming sweat from his eyes with the sleeve of his shirt.

"How that mountain wind cuts! It's like a knife. We'll camp here, Patricio."

They had picked their way down a steep hillside into a fairy-land—a glade where they stepped ankle deep in pine needles, kicking up the thousand-year-old scent from the warm earth. A bevy of quail scurried noisily off into the brush and, afar, a coyote sent his yelp shrilling up to the stars. The night wind drew cold down the cañon.

Tom swung himself out of the saddle and untied his cinch with one pull. Instantly a burro, seeing the act, stretched himself, pricked his ears forward and broke full-voiced into a resonant bray. Horses whinny and neigh on leaving camp; mules and burros give voice when they reach it.

"Glory be to the saints!" quoth Patricio. "*Señor!*"

But Tom's hand was raised for silence. Patricio stopped with his mouth open as if suddenly stricken with paralysis as there rang out through the cold moonlight a half-mile up the valley a loud, discordant bray in answer to the voice of their own burro.

"A wild burro."

Tom shook his head.

"Wild burros don't bray at night. They know it would draw mountain lions. We're bein' followed."

"By whom, *señor?*"

"How should I know? Yonder comes the dawn. It'll be light enough to see in a little. I have it. I tell you what we'll do, Patricio. Saddle up again and we'll move on. I'll move down on the flat there for about a hundred yards so the people following us can see me.

"It's a cinch that if they're following us with burros by this trail they'll leave their burros on the trail here on the hills while they investigate me and my fire. To follow us where we're going, they'll need packs.

"Do you know a man named Sydnor?"

"*Sí, señor.* I know him and so does Señor Boyce, my *padrone.*"

"Drive your burros on ahead and watch. Daylight is opening now in the cañon and we will be able to see in a half-hour. If Sydnor is trailing us he's after me.

"The moment he leaves his burros you sneak back and spoil his packs for him. What can you do?"

Patricio grinned.

"Cut his lash-ropes. Without a lash-rope a man in these hills is as helpless as a toothless man with a big bone. Make a big fire, *señor*, but keep beyond the ring of the firelight so they can not see to shoot."

The astonished burros were again herded along the rough trail. When they had disappeared Tom listened carefully with his ear to the earth and caught quite plainly the quick patter of a lightly loaded burro.

"Hm! A trottin' burro. He's loaded light. Now for it!"

He pushed his tired pony down the slope, making all the noise he could, and with ostentatious carelessness heaped up a pile of wood. He thrust a match into a nest of pine-needles and dry leaves. A quick ripple of flame licked over the pile. Presently it

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broke into a crackling fork of leaping flame edged with black smoke.

His quick ear caught the tramp of a pony among the rocks. Then the sound changed to a softly thudding step as the strange horse left the rocks for the pine-needles.

Instantly Tom slipped his rifle from its sheath. Presently two shining eyes appeared among the trees and he knew that his pursuer was blinded by the fire-light. He stepped back into the shadow of a tree.

Sydnor, following him, was at a loss. He saw Tom's pony and he had at first seen Tom; now Tom had disappeared. With an oath he sprang from his saddle, wrenching at his gun; but before it came loose:

"Up! Hands above your head, Sydnor, or I'll ballast you for keeps."

THERE was deadly menace in the voice. Sydnor felt his back-bone tingling. There is more in a voice than is generally believed. His hands shot high in air as Tom strode forward, and his rifle crashed to earth as Tom advanced. Tom halted six feet from him.

"What the —— 're you trailin' me for, Sydnor?"

There was cold menace in his tone and his eyes glittered dangerously. His lips were smiling.

"Who's trailin' you?"

"Who? I'm thinkin' it's the man who roped me last night and robbed me. By ——, Sydnor, I've seen a man killed for less. Shut up—" for Sydnor attempted to reply. "Don't tell me any lie about seein' my fire an' ridin' over to see who it was. I aimed to make you do it. Got a partner?"

His eye caught sight of Pedro following Sydnor.

"Hey you! Come here! Move just one finger and I'll plug you both. Get me? Drop that knife on top of your boss's rifle."

Tom knew that at twenty feet a Mexican's knife was as dangerous as a rifle. The knife tinkled among the rocks as the sullen Pedro came forward.

"Now, Sydnor, what's up? Why have you favored me with your attention? Keep your hands up, man, or I'll smash one of 'em just to show you I mean what I say."

The rifle-barrel followed the slowly descending hands. Instantly they shot up to the length of his arms.

"You'd better shoot while you've got the drop," snarled Sydnor. "If there's any law in this land I'll see if you can hold up men like this, you —— road-agent. This is a free range, I guess."

"It ain't as free as you think it is. It ain't free enough for you to trail me."

A distant whoop made him grin cheerfully. It was Patricio assuring him that the work was done. A sudden thought came to Tom.

"You, Pedro, pick up that knife. Now cut the cinches on both your saddles. Don't make any mistake about it. Cut 'em right! That's it."

The cursing Sydnor, his hands high in air, watched the frightened Pedro cut and slash at their four cinches.

"Now the bridles. Cut 'em into scrap leather. If you follow me any farther it'll be on foot. Good-by, gentlemen."

Quickly retrieving the rifle that Sydnor had dropped, he sprang into his saddle and was off among the trees, pausing only long enough to smash the stock of the rifle and throw it away. A moment later he had joined Patricio, who was waiting for him among the rocks.

"*Señor*—look! Have I done well?"

Tom cast one look at the havoc that Patricio had wrought and admiration showed in his eyes. Every girth had been cut not into two pieces but into twenty. Every lash-rope was cut into six-inch lengths.

The *mantas*, the canvas covers that wrap the packs, were slit from end to end, and the sawbuck pack-saddles had been pounded into pieces. Over the hideous scene of wreckage the burros gazed wonderingly. They could not have done better themselves.

VI

PALO VERDE was a long two days' travel from the railroad. For ten hours the buckboard hurled Helen steadily southward, at times over a boulder-strewn trail, later beside long dry *arroyos* that in turn gave on a flat plain where only prairie-dogs and little white owls could live.

"A lonely land," Helen sighed.

The driver jerked his head and ejected a thin stream of tobacco-juice with the accuracy of a fire-hose. A mud-dauber, lighting for a second on the rump of the off pony, was washed into eternity.

"No wonder it's lonely, miss. So'd you be lonely if nobody knowed how good you was."

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Helen smiled at the odd conceit. Then he began to think. She knew Jepson well enough not to ask him what he meant. When a man means anything it is death to he thought to be called on to explain it.

"How long have you lived here, Mr. Jepson?" she asked finally.

"I come here along with Marlin rifles and roulette-wheels, miss. Hello! There's that ol' pirate Peter Boyce! Look at him, will you, settin' on that boulder like a ol' crow waitin' fer a cow to die."

He drew up his ponies in answer to Mr. Boyce's upraised finger.

"Mornin', John. Mornin', Miss Helen. Got room fer a boarder as far as Wells? All right then; give me an upper berth. My land! This road's about twenty——"

"Twenty what?"

"Just twenty. I read that in a book once. The man said it didn't give no idea of the goodness er the badness of a thing to say, 'It's pretty good,' or, 'Right bad,' or that a girl was beautiful or nothin' like that; but if everything was based on the scale of a hundred and everybody knowed it we could apply percentages. A road worth only twenty's a pretty —— bad road.

"Now Miss Helen here I'd say is about ninety-nine fine-lookin' this mornin' an' I'm a hundred an' twenty thirsty. What you got in your mail-sack, John?"

"Mail."

"Aye! I know. Ain't a ol' rabbit laid a glass egg in there fer me? I seem to hear somethin' clinkin'. Maybe it's your fountain pen. I knowed a man, the year after the State went dry, what carried a fountain pen that held an even quart.

"Never mind. Better git ahead. Pour the leather into them ponies, John."

Mr. Jepson gave him a curious look and "poured leather" into the startled ponies. They responded with a leap that snapped the occupants of the buck-board backward and then forward and they were off at a gallop down the road.

Mile after mile they laid behind them; dusty miles that tailed away back to the North exactly as a carpenter throws a brown shaving over his shoulder. At first Mr. Boyce indulged in badinage with Jepson; then he fell silent, as men do in overland travel in the West. The sense of illimitable distance shuts down on them like a lid.

Once a coyote, tail a-droop, slunk along the edge of an *arroyo*. In crossing a wooded spur a bunch of horses, led by a slate-gray stallion, head and tail up, his eyes fairly ablaze, hurled themselves across the track. The stallion's croup was raked with raw red parallel lines from which blood had flowed over his flanks and caked with sweat and dust.

"Barbed wire."

Helen pointed to him as he plunged into the mesquite.

"Mountain lion. They'll pass up sheep an' goats every time to git a horse. Seems like the wool an' long hair bothers 'em. That there horse'll be a wise horse from now on. I'll bet he'll never go under an over-hangin' tree again."

Helen looked her question.

"You see, Miss Helen, a mountain lion picks out a tree near the water an' squats on an overhangin' limb. Then when a stallion with his mares comes to drink he just naturally drops on one of 'em—a colt fer choice."

It took them two days to reach the railroad; two days, each of which seemed to Helen a week long. They had early left behind them the mesquite-dotted levels and were heading for the upper reaches of the great divide. Red mesas, edged on the west by tremendous cliffs, stretched away to the right, dotted with Spanish bayonet and the swollen, unhealthy-looking prickly-pear.

"At last."

Peter Boyce hitched forward in his seat and pointed to the south, where the land rose in swale on swale of red and yellow ridges each merging imperceptibly into the background of sulfur-yellow earth, outlined against a pale turquoise sky. A sooty column of smoke stained it.

"That's the railroad."

Three hours later Mr. Jepson decanted them at a primitive little station.

"Good-by," he said. "I don't know where you're goin' but—on your way."

The train crawled to them from under the staring blue arch of the west, and Mr. Boyce helped Helen to the car platform.

"Say John—" a sudden thought came to him—"if Darke & Wettin was to ask you when you git back who was your passengers an' where they went, what would you say?"

"Who? Me? I'd tell the truth," said Mr. Jepson virtuously. "I'd say I picked up Peter Boyce at Eston—I did—an' that Miss Keene went to Los Angeles. On your

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way you ol' pirate, or the train'll leave you."

Mr. Boyce made a flying leap for the departing train and caught it—both knees on the edge of the top step, his gray beard grinding into the cinder-strewn car platform. It was the attitude of a devout Mussulman; but his language was the lurid speech of the unlettered frontier. The porter admiringly helped him to his feet and Helen, giggling audibly, fled inside the car.

AT THE Grand Cañon they fell among friends, for Helen found Cynthia Hazen waiting for her.

"I had about given you up," Cynthia laughed. "But I knew it was an awful trip from Palo Verde. I learned that much from your letters."

"It was rather rough. Cynthia, this is Mr. Boyce. He is an old and very good friend of mine."

Cynthia thrust out her hand, to have it engulfed in Mr. Boyce's paw. His eyes gleamed approvingly as he noted the tall, graceful figure; the great hazel eyes with the soft light of forest pools that still hold the departing sunlight; the brilliant carmine of her lips and the mass of soft brown hair shot with reddish gleams as of new copper. Mrs. Hazen was distinctly good-looking.

"How long a vacation have you?"

"Oh, wait!"

Helen was almost breathless.

"I've got such a plan. Wait till we get to my room. I'll tell you then. I persuaded Mr. Boyce to come. He used to be a guide here years ago. He knows every inch of the cañon. Don't you, Mr. Boyce?"

"Well, Miss Helen, I don't say that. That's a big order. I was with Colonel Powell when he went down the cañon—never mind the date. I'm a young man yit, Mis' Hazen, but I figure you'll see something that you never seen before if you foller Miss Helen's lead. I'll leave you-all now."

And Peter Boyce strode off, to be welcomed by the clerk, who knew him by repute, and to pose as Sir Oracle among the guides while Cynthia Hazen took Helen to her room.

Once there Helen talked. In ten minutes she had told Cynthia all that it had taken Ben Jewett ten years to learn. Mrs. Hazen sat up.

"Why, my dear, it sounds like a story! It sounds like the wildest Western fiction that the films have ever shown. Pretty girl working as typewriter for a crooked firm; poor old prospector comes to them for aid; girl helps him. What do you call it? Oh yes; 'grubstakes' him; old man found dying in the desert three months later by a handsome young prospector—You said Mr. Hardin was handsome, didn't you?"

"If you admire rags and cinders, dust and blood," said Helen austerely. "What has that to do with it?"

"Much. And then you get Mr. Boyce to come here with you. You ask me to go with you—to chaperon you——"

"And you go," said Helen.

"And I go," said Cynthia quickly. "Wild horses couldn't hold me back. Where do we go? How long will we be gone?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. This is Wednesday. On Saturday we will go into the cañon with a camping outfit. We will tell the people here that we will camp down below for a few days.

"On Sunday we will cross the Grand Cañon and meet Mr. Hardin on the north side. He will have a prospector's outfit there for us and we will try to find what old Mr. Jewett left us."

PETER BOYCE spent the next two days getting his camping outfit together.

"Goin' to spend a month?" demanded a grinning packer as he helped Peter cinch a blanket-laden burro.

"You need as much fer two days as you do fer two months, barrin' grub," quoth Mr. Boyce sententiously. "All right. Head them burros down the trail, Ike."

He moved his pony into the trail ahead of the girls and started down the path.

Most sight-seers take those trails on foot. The sight of the six-thousand-foot cliffs staggers and dazes with their successive vistas of range below range of red and brown and sulfur-yellow cut by domes and cones and peaks of slate-blue and white and purple.

Above lie the whispering pines, fringing the edge of chaos, through which liquid sunlight seems to drip like gold. Six thousand feet below lies the heaped jumble of peaks and rocks and stunted trees, a mass of riotous, drunken colors that drives the painter-craft wild with envy because no one believes their faintest attempt at reproduction.

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Down, down down they went, the stones kicked loose by their careless ponies' hoofs, rattling and scaling away into the roaring echoes among the pines below them.

"I took a lady down here once," Mr. Boyce wheezed. "I brung her down; she come most of the way settin'. Aye! Settin' an' slidin' an' yellin'. When she got down she looked all around her an' all she could find to say was—

"'Must have took some time to make it, Mr. Boyce.'"

Cynthia laughed.

"In six days He made heaven and earth."

"Yes, m'm! An' they wasn't no eight-hour union days neither. Here's our camp Miss Helen."

That night was a revelation to Cynthia. Even to Helen, who was used to camping, the scene was new—the crackling camp-fire; the air redolent with pine and balsam; the beds of springy pine-boughs; the cool evening air that drove down upon them from the cracks and crannies of the beetling cliffs.

They made an early start the next morning.

"It's a good fifteen miles, miss. There's where we're headin' for."

Mr. Boyce pointed in the general direction of the Haunted Mesa that lies at the foot of the great Kaibab Plateau.

Mile after mile they wound their way by devious trails across that tremendous valley. Balked at one ford of the river, they came to another, tried a third and finally got across and stood on the north bank.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Boyce, blowing like a porpoise, hailed them.

"Yonder it is, Miss Helen—look!"

Their gaze followed his finger. Clear and distinct against the arch of the hot sky, a long column of black smoke shot up against the blue.

"That'll be Hardin. Look how black his smoke is. He's burnin' wet wood to give us a good signal. Let's hit the trail."

Mr. Boyce's shrill whoop aroused Tom a half-mile away. As they came up the rise they saw him standing on a great rock watching them from under the sharp of his hand. Presently he came running.

He shook hands warmly with Helen, slapped Mr. Boyce on the shoulder and was duly introduced to Cynthia, who eyed him with strong approval. She liked the frank boyishness of his greeting. She liked his looks, his actions; but then Cynthia Hazen had come prepared to like whatever should happen to her.

"I've made camp," said Tom cheerily. "I had a kind of a run-in with a man named Sydnor four days back. It didn't amount to much."

Mr. Boyce eyed him sharply for a little but said no word.

"I packed a little tent for you, Miss Helen."

Tom pointed to a small, conical tent that he had pitched.

"I suggest that we camp here and pull out at daylight. I'll get supper now."

"My dear!"

Cynthia drew Helen aside as Tom carried their blankets to the tent.

"He's better than I thought—your Mr. Hardin——"

Helen said nothing. She had begun to think so too.

VII

JOBED DARKE, sitting in his office, was astounded by the sudden opening of the door. It crashed open and a dusty, disheveled figure flung into the room. Darke took one look at him and sprang to his feet, upsetting his chair.

"Sydnor!"

He almost shouted the word.

"Sydnor! What brings you here? I thought you were miles away."

"I would be miles away but for that —— road-agent."

Sydnor's face was black with wrath.

"Who? Who had the nerve to hold you up?"

"That man Hardin, —— him! If ever I git another rope about his neck I'll pull it till somethin' breaks."

"Shut up! I don't know what you're talkin' about, but—shut up!"

Darke looked about him fearfully.

"Sit down, man, and tell me what happened—quietly."

"——, man! You've only got to see my cinches for the story. I follered him till I came to a place where he got the drop on me. Pulled a gun and while he held me up his Mexican went through my packs and cut them into scraps. I had to come back."

"Where was all this?"

"Up on Yellow Mesa. Look here, Darke! How far do you figure to go in this matter?"

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"To the limit, of course. It's our one chance to make a pile. I don't quite see it myself, but my partner says that it's the surest thing he's ever bucked up against. He knows ores an' gold, you know."

"I know. If you'll pay the bills I'll get me a crowd of men that Hardin can't stand off an' I'll foller him an' git him."

"How can you follow him now?" demanded the cautious Mr. Darke.

"How?" Sydnor exploded. "By trailin' him, of course. Where do you reckon I was raised, not to be able to track a man an' a burro? I want four or five men an' I know exactly where to git 'em if you'll pay the bill."

"All right. I—we'll stand the gaff but—Just one thing, Sydnor. There must be no killing—mind that! The affair's risky enough anyway. We can't stand any fool gun-play. Understand?"

Sydnor grinned at him—an evil, leering grin, his yellow teeth showing like fangs under his stubbly mustache.

"I see. You want to keep clear of it. I don't blame you. Never mind that. What you don't know won't hurt you. But no man can pull a gun on me on the open range, hold me up and cut my packs up an' get away with it. Will you stand the cost?"

"How much'll it be?" demanded the cautious Darke.

"About five hundred."

"Go ahead then. I'll pay it. Don't tell me your plans."

Without another word Sydnor banged out of the office. For the next two hours he was a busy man.

In every town where Mexicans live there is always one man who knows where others can be found. Sydnor was not long in locating his men, for Palo Verde had many unemployed. He got five men whom he had known before.

"I'll pay fifty dollars apiece and the grub. We won't be gone more'n ten days. Will you go, Eustacio?"

Eustacio, a squat, squint-eyed *vaquero*, grinned cheerfully.

"*Señor*," he replied nonchalantly, "I would go to —— for fifty dollars. What are we to do?"

"Ride with me and obey orders," rapped out Sydnor.

"*Sí—ciertamente.* Only, *señor*—no killing. Old Mexico is too far away to take that risk. Now a little matter of leaving a man afoot on the desert—the Painted Desert—a hand-of-God accident—no one can prevent that. But—no killing, *señor. El sangre habla alto* (Blood cries loud). Am I right, *hombres?*"

"*Sí, sí, compaero.* You have the right of it."

Sydnor looked at them angrily. He could not endure having hired men, desperadoes, say what they would or would not do.

"Very well then. I agree to that. There shall be no killing; but you will carry out orders short of that."

"*Sí, sí*—of course."

"Get your ponies and leave town one at a time. Don't ride together, and don't ride by the northern road. Leave by the southern trail and ride around the town. Meet me at the *Cima Amarillo*—Yellow Peak—*sabe?* Be there at ten o'clock."

"*Sí, señor. Adios. Hasta luego.*"

Sydnor strolled back to his room, his mind intent on his plans. There was not much to his plot. He knew that Hardin was alone except for an unarmed Mexican. By hard riding he could reach the place where he had been held up.

The Yellow Peak was nearly as prominent as a sore thumb, standing forty feet above the plain. Sydnor was first there. He had refused to pay a dollar till the affair was completed. One by one the men drifted up to him out of the moonlight, shifting shadows rising suddenly out of the brush.

"All here?"

"*Sí, señor*—all here."

"Good."

Sydnor assured himself of the fact.

"Keep your ponies closed up on me, you lazy scoundrels, and take the pace from me."

He took the head of the column and led them off by the trail that he had ridden two days before.

Sunup found them five miles short of their destination. Their ponies showed plainly the effect of the night ride among the rocks and boulders, up and down the shaly slopes. A loose shoe, a stumble among the stones on a ledge, and Sydnor's pony blundered to his nose.

"Hup, you fool!"

Sydnor jerked him up with a bloody mouth. The man's face was black with rage.

"A tired horse makes a rough trip, *señor.*"

"Who spoke to you? Shut up, will you? We will rest here."

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There was no help for it. The tired ponies stood with trembling legs, their heads and tails drooping. Not another mile could they do. Sydnor knew it and the knowledge further enraged him.

In addition to that, a cold wind blew up a rift of clouds from the south and a drenching downpour of rain wet them to the skin.

"The only rain we've had in a year. Of course it had to come when I've got to trail. It'll wash out all the trail-sign. Now we are in a sweet mess. Hardin must be headin' for Shinimo Creek Valley. He can't get water after he leaves them springs. I've a notion to make a short-cut."

Common sense forbade it. A mistake could not be corrected. He could only follow Hardin as best he could. The hard rain had not entirely destroyed the "sign" at the place where Tom had halted his burros, but the marks were so slight that no definite tracks were left. A mile farther along the hillside Eustacio found the clear print of a burro's hoof. Again, a clump of succulent grass had been nipped off close, showing that the burros had stood there for some minutes.

That night Sydnor made a dry camp and his men cursed accordingly. Early in the morning they were astir, hunting for the telltale trail. Occasionally that day they picked up a track; never enough to justify rapid travel but sufficient to make them hunt carefully for more.

It was on the third day as they climbed a steep bank covered with pine-needles that Eustacio held up a warning hand.

"They came along here yesterday, *señor*."

Sydnor dashed forward at a gallop, threw himself out of the saddle to examine the tracks in the pine-needles.

"Early yesterday mornin'."

He nodded his head.

"There's sand on the needles. The sand would not have stuck to those needles unless they were wet. It rained night before last. You're right, Eustacio. Push ahead."

WHILE Sydnor with his party were so carefully trailing him Tom was having troubles of his own. Peter Boyce called him into consultation that night after Helen and Cynthia had gone to their blankets.

"Play all your cards face up, Hardin. What're you aimin' to do?"

"Exactly what we planned, Mr. Boyce. Two days' ride will take us to where I found Jewett. Then we'll locate the cañon and the place he told us of.

"If we can do it, all well and good. If we can't— Well, we'll be out of luck, that's all. In a week we'll know all about it."

Peter Boyce snorted.

"Man! I've knowed old Ben Jewett fer twenty years. He had prospectin' in his blood. You're a minin' man yourself, Hardin, an' you know that there's no man in the world who fools hisself like a prospector. Old Ben was always just goin' to make his everlastin' fortune. He's had two small-sized fortunes in his hands, but he throwed 'em both away lookin' fer somethin' bigger."

"He found it!" ejaculated Tom.

"So you say."

Mr. Boyce was plainly skeptical.

"Ondoubtedly he must've found a good pocket. More'n that you'll have to show me. How far is it from here?"

"A good fifty miles. Better turn in now if we're to get any sleep."

Patricio got them up early for coffee and bacon with flapjacks.

Mr. Boyce eyed them suspiciously.

"I never knowed him to make 'em but once before and I mind that first time."

"Where was that?"

"I was up in the Red Rock country with a party from Washington what was diggin' up Aztec ruins. We sent the pack-train back fer grub, keepin' one old jack to carry all we had left with us. He stampeded, throwed his pack an' left us with twenty-five pounds o' flour, ten of sugar an' ten quarts of whisky.

"We made Patricio cook fer the outfit. It was shore the biggest mistake we ever made. We had lost every ounce of food except what I told you—sugar an' flour an' whisky.

"He made flapjacks fer breakfast and the outfit went to exhumin' some old ruins. They come back to dinner an' got flapjacks again with some kind of —— sirup that Patricio had made outen sugar an' whisky.

"Man, it was the queerest outfit you ever seen. Them perfessors what never drunk a drop eat about ten big flapjacks an' licked up nigh a pint of that sirup apiece."

"Well?"

"They went back to work an' come back in the evenin' with the biggest find that had ever been made in Arizona. Old Perfessor

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Winston come in luggin' a pack of long bones that he said was the ondoubted remains of the most perfect specimen of the Aztec race that had ever been discovered.

"I didn't say nothin'. I hadn't eat none of that sirup.

"All three of 'em worked fer two days puttin' them bones together. The missin' parts they built up with adobe mud; an' believe me, they got the ——est-lookin' object you ever seen. He was seven foot high, four foot wide an' looked like an elephant.

"'Perfect!' says doc, rubbin' his hands and signin' Patricio fer more syrup. 'Perfect! A reg'lar giant. He dates back to the Chichimecs ondoubtedly. An' that's about the year nine hundred.'

"It wasn't my business, so I says nothin'. It was three days till the pack-train got in with grub, an' all the time they was eatin' them flapjacks an' soakin up the sirup like two dollars' worth of blue blottin'-paper.

"They wouldn't wait till the day to go back, but they packed up that skeleton and shipped it back to the railroad. Then we got good grub and for four days they eat like Indians or coyotes. When they got fed up they had doubts about their skeleton; but when we got back the papers was all full of accounts of what they'd found an' the picture of the giant was in all the Sunday papers."

Mr. Boyce broke off.

"Well?" demanded Tom, waiting patiently.

"It was a good giant," said Mr. Boyce reflectively. "It had ought to've been a good one. It took three perfessors an' the bones of five burros to make it.

"They had hit on a boneyard where the settlers had killed off a lot of wild burros to save the range-grass fer the cattle. Yet today you'll find people what'll argue that prohibition's good fer a State. Ready to start?"

They were off again upon the trail. By now the good grass-land had been passed and they faced the long ridges of bare sand, the outer limits of the great Painted Desert that shows red and blue and purple in the dawning; that changes to sulfur-yellow and to crimson ocher under the noonday sun and melts again to blue and gray and turquoise lights when the twilight draws down from the higher ranges.

All day long they plodded methodically over the sandy waste, their horses sinking fetlock deep in the hot sands. All day long they carefully husbanded the blood-warm water in their canteens.

"Yonder's a tree! Glory be!" Mr. Boyce pointed to his right-front.

They hastened forward eagerly toward the one cottonwood that heralded water. In twenty minutes Patricio and Tom had unpacked the burros, camp was made, the supper was cooking and the five, intent on their immediate comfort, never suspected that another party was close upon their trail.

"Herd guard," suggested Tom tentatively.

Mr. Boyce sniffed.

"No danger. Them burros'll make enough noise to wake the dead if any Indian comes near camp. Good night."

He rolled himself in his blanket and sank to sleep. In ten minutes Tom had followed his example and the camp slept under the stars.

VIII

THE gleam of their fire could be seen across the plain for five miles. It was particularly visible from the last long ridge that they had crossed a little before sunset.

Two hours after Tom had rolled in his blankets and dropped off to sleep, a head rose above the crest of that ridge; then a man backed his horse down the far slope till only his head showed above the slope.

He saw the fire and would take no chances.

Even in the dusk his upflung hand checked the men who rode behind him.

All day long they too had plodded fetlock deep in the hot sand; they had lost the trail and were heading for water, leaving the choice of direction to their thirsty ponies. There is only one better guide to water than a thirsty horse. Strange to say that one is a jackass. When things go wrong in the desert, many a wise man has been set right by an ass.

"We've got 'em as sure as shootin'," growled Sydnor. "Struck 'em by accident after all. Now what'll we do? Wait a bit."

"Surround the camp and ride in on them, *señor*," suggested Eustacio. He believed in direct methods.

"An' have them pump lead at us as soon as we come into the fire-circle. That'd be a fool's trick. We sure played in luck catchin' 'em.

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"Now listen. There's only Hardin an' his packer there. Their burros'll be grazin' far out from the camp 'cause the grass's poor an' they'll have to go far out to eat. The chances are they ain't hobbled.

"One of you men sneak around the other side of the camp, find them burros an' stampede 'em. Bein' used to Mexicans, the burros'll let Segundo there git close to 'em. Rope one of 'em, Segundo, an' twist his ear so he'll bray.

"If it's Hardin's camp either he or his packer'll come out to see what ails the burros. That's when we'll get him. When we've got one we kin do what we want with the other. See?"

"*Bueno.* It is good."

All thought it good except Segundo, who did not at all admire the plan. It involved for him a three-mile tramp over loose rocks with the possibility of being shot at at the end of it. Argument availed him not at all. Slowly they drew closer to the camp till it was but a mile away.

"Tie the horses here and one man stay with 'em. If they smell the camp they'll whinny. If they start that, grab 'em by the nose to stop 'em.

"Now, Segundo, move out. Find them grazin' burros an' drive 'em out from the camp; then make 'em kick up a fuss so either Hardin' or his packer comes out to 'em. We'll meet you later."

Segundo pussyfooted away into the gloom. It swallowed him up as sand swallows water. A little later the others followed him.

Once as they drew near the camp a noise roused old Peter Boyce. He got up, threw some brush on the fire and again lay down.

Far out beyond the ring of the firelight Segundo found the grazing burros. One of them was pawing an empty sirup-can till it rattled loudly.

Very gently the Mexican crept on hands and knees to within a few yards of the burros; then threw a small stone. The burro shook his ears and strolled a little farther from camp. Yard by yard Segundo followed him, pausing from time to time to be sure that the other burros were following. They always do. Jackasses are strangely like men in many ways. Step by step the four burros followed the tinkling bell on the leader that tolled them farther and farther from camp. At last, when he judged the time was come, Segundo slipped his lariat from his belt, shortened his loop and cast.

The rope swirled out with a snap and settled about the startled burro. Too wise to move after the rope had settled, he stood astonished while Segundo seized a long ear and twisted it.

A long, resonant bray of pain brought Patricio from his cold bed.

"Thou Sabio—accursed ass!"

Patricio said other things, for he well knew that if he were not caught up, Sabio might lead those burros five miles afield.

"Go get 'em, Patricio," mumbled Mr. Boyce. "You an' them other jackasses is the trial of my virtuous life."

He rolled over again while Patricio cursed his way out into the darkness.

Two hundred yards out he found Sabio. As he was about to round up that astute animal he felt a cold ring pressed to the back of his neck and found himself being poked in the soft flesh with a cocked pistol.

Had it been a knife Patricio would have taken a chance and let out a yell that would have alarmed the camp, but a pistol was different.

"Shout for your *señor*," growled Segundo.

Patricio was about to protest when five other figures, squat, dark, terrorizing figures, closed up about him.

"An' see that you shout out exactly what you're told to yell," growled Sydnor.

"Call him!" Segundo urged. "Say, *Señor*, come quickly!"

Still Patricio hesitated.

With an oath Sydnor pulled a knife from one of the men and thrust a half-inch of steel into Patricio's back. Patricio yelled in earnest.

"*Señor—señor*—for the love of God——"

No more was needed. The darkness, the surprize and above all the cold of the desert night lent real terror to Patricio and his voice thinned to a screech.

It brought Mr. Boyce to his feet and sent him scurrying out into the night toward the sound. He arrived just in time to face two cold barrels, behind which four gleaming eyes told him that the men were in earnest.

His hands went up instantly. There was nothing else to do.

"What the——"

He started to talk.

"Shut up."

Sydnor thrust his face close to the old man's.

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"Boyce!" he said amazedly. "What're you doin' with Hardin? Who's he got there in that camp?"

There was no possible evasion. Mr. Boyce told him. Sydnor stood astounded.

"We're takin' the ladies on a campin'-trip," said Mr. Boyce, lying pleasantly.

"No, you ain't, either. You mean you thought you was. I see—at least I'm beginnin' to see."

He thrust his face closer to the old man.

"Keep back, Sydnor! Keep back a bit. You smell like a burro. What d' ye want?"

"Keep him here Eustacio. Wait! Put your hands down—behind you, Boyce, an' do it darned quick. We're a hundred miles north of the law."

IT WAS true. The hands came down. Sydnor cut a four-foot piece from a lariat and tied Mr. Boyce's hands behind him.

"I reckon that'll hold you. Keep him here, Fidelio. If he tries to yell, stick your knife in him. Eustacio, come with me."

In dumb surprize Mr. Boyce, standing like a trussed turkey, saw his captor move off into the night followed by Eustacio. He eyed them viciously, squirming in his bonds.

"If you-all take my advice I'll tell you right now—go easy! Just remember there's a joker in every pack an' you never know where it'll lie in the next deal——"

A hand smote him roughly across the mouth and he subsided with a grunt while Sydnor and Eustacio moved softly toward the camp.

They knew now that Tom Hardin was the only man in camp. They also knew that he was the most dangerous of the lot. Mr. Boyce with the colder judgment of age might not have proceeded to extremes. Tom Hardin would shoot on sight.

They drifted up through the low-lying scrub till they lay just outside the ring of the firelight. Across the fire they could see the brown pyramid of the tent, the firelight flickering along its face. Tom had spread his blankets before the door. He was sleeping soundly.

Sydnor and Eustacio made another détour and approached him from the rear of the tent.

"Wait till I stir up the fire," growled Sydnor. "I may want good shootin'-light. Get your rope ready, Eustacio. I'll throw some wood on the fire an' then you rope him when he sets up. Don't be afeard of pullin' too hard. You ain't ropin' a calf. All ready?"

Eustacio nodded and Sydnor, seeing that his pistol lay loose in the holster, threw an armful of wood on the fire and then stepped back a pace with drawn pistol.

The mesquite-brush, dry and thorny, full of ripe, brown beans, crackled like rifle-fire. At the first crackle the blankets flung aside and Tom rolled to his knees.

The short coils of the lariat flung out in a ten-foot throw. Before the loop had fairly settled Eustacio took up the slack with a vicious snap that brought the loop about Tom's neck.

He fell back to earth with the grunt that every *vaquero* knows. It was the grunt that meant utter unconsciousness, when every vestige of breath and resistance has been choked out of the victim.

When man or beast has passed through that stage of being roped he has experienced the worst horror of being hanged. A half-minute more of it and the choked soul would have been torn from the quivering body.

When Tom regained consciousness, a dim, hazy, bloodshot consciousness, he found his hands roped behind him, his belt unbuckled and Sydnor grinning evilly at him. Eustacio still held the end of the lariat, the loop of which had not been removed from Tom's neck.

"Ready to talk, Hardin? I reckon you an' me's about due fer a little *hablante*."

Tom said nothing. His choked and stifled wits were slowly coming back to life. He knew very well what had happened. He had grasped that instantly.

What men could Sydnor have with him? What did he mean to do? Men like Sydnor are men of one idea only.

A sudden thought came to him. What of the girls? What would happen to Helen—already he thought of her as Helen—and Cynthia Hazen with no one now to take care of them? He knew Sydnor's caliber. They were at his mercy for the time being. He must find out what the man wanted and if possible give it to him.

"I say we're due fer a talk."

"Water," said Tom hoarsely.

His voice was cracked and husky and his blackened tongue looked swollen between his cracked lips, for he had fallen

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face first on the sharp gravel, and Eustacio had dragged him with a rough hand.

"Give him water, Eustacio."

The *vaquero* shortened the lariat and held a canteen to his lips. Most of the water ran down his shirt but a few drops found their way into his mouth. He licked his lips.

"Do you know where that cañon is where that old fool Jewett located his claim?"

Tom hesitated for a moment and Eustacio tightened his rope. Sydnor held up his hand.

"Look here, Hardin!. You an' me may as well have a showdown. I know all about the papers that Jewett gave you. I mean to find out where that claim lies. If you'll show me where that cañon is I'll turn you-all loose."

"Suppose I don't," said Tom grimly with what little breath he had left. "You can't find the place without me, Sydnor. I don't know where that cañon is—exactly.

"Suppose I don't show it to you? You don't dare kill us and you know it. You don't dare do it. Law runs in the mesquite now."

"Not today in Arizona," grinned Sydnor. "We can do —— well what we choose an' you know it. Suppose two prospectors an' a Mexican packer walk over the edge of a cliff in the night on a bad trail an' are all picked up by me an' my party a week later; ain't that a hand-o'-God accident?"

THE rumble of his deep voice vibrant with anger carried far. It woke both Helen and Cynthia, sleeping lightly enough in the little tent. Surprized at hearing a strange voice in the camp, Cynthia Hazen listened for a moment. Then she pulled the front of the tent open and looked out.

The glow of the firelight struck full upon her face. Her eyes, still heavy with sleep, shone deep and lustrous in the glow; her face was flushed and her glorious hair enveloped her face and white neck as with a brown veil. Behind her Helen's lovely face looked over her shoulder.

"What has happened? Who are you?" demanded Cynthia sharply.

"Go back in that tent an' stay there. I'll tend to you later," commanded Sydnor sharply.

Cynthia paid no attention to him. Tom cut in sharply.

"Go back, Mrs. Hazen. Go back, for God's sake, and wait."

"Yes—wait," muttered Sydnor, his eyes beginning to gleam slumbrously. "That's a good-lookin' pair you've picked to travel alone with, Hardin."

"Shut your vile mouth."

"Got you on the raw, have I? Now look here, Hardin. I ain't aimin' to have no more trouble with you than I kin help but —I mean to know all about that there claim o' Jewett's. I've got your friend Boyce an' your packer roped like a couple of yearlin's, just like you are. I've got all your campin' outfit. I've got your women in my hands—I mean just what I say.

"If you do what I want—if you take me to the cañon where Jewett located his claim—I'll turn you all loose at my own time in my own way. If you don't do it, so help me God I'll take you an' Boyce an' the greaser with the burros an' run you over the Rim Rock of the cañon. It could easy happen at night an' you know it! You know what that means. An' the women——"

"Go on."

Tom licked his dry lips. Sydnor saw it and grinned.

"I've got all the papers about Jewett's claim," went on Sydnor. "Findin' it's just a question of time. As fer the girls, well, I reckon they won't be in no hurry to go back to their friends after a month or so out here with them—Mexicans."

The last word was an afterthought and Tom knew it. He looked Sydnor squarely in the face. He knew by the flash of evil light that had flamed in the man's eyes when he saw Cynthia Hazen framed in the tent-door that all talk of leaving her to the Mexicans was subterfuge. He knew that he could not trust any agreement that Sydnor might make.

What could he do? If he should agree to show Sydnor the cañon he would at least get him away from the girls and gain a little time, and it was from Sydnor that the greatest danger threatened.

At the thought of Helen his heart sank. If he could separate Sydnor from the party the Mexicans would not dare touch the girls. He nodded his head slowly.

"I've got no choice," he said with deep despondency. "I'll show you."

"I thought you'd have some sense," commented Sydnor grimly. "Call up the men, Eustacio."

Eustacio thrust two very dirty fingers into his mouth and whistled shrilly. In a

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few minutes, cursing as they slipped and shuffled over the sharp shale, Sydnor's men appeared herding Patricio and Mr. Boyce before them, dejected and forlorn.

"Just one word—" Sydnor fairly hissed the words—"I won't have one of you speak a word to each other. If you try it I'll gag you with a Mexican bit. You know what that's like.

"Fidelio, you an' Segundo come with me. Get that man's pony an' saddle it.

"Fidelio, you'll come with me. Eustacio, you take charge of this camp. Keep everything exactly as it is till I come back. Understand?"

Eustacio nodded.

"Keep these men tied up. Watch 'em all the time. Give the women the freedom of the camp. If any man lays a finger on either of them girls— especially the big one —I'll cut his heart out. *Sabe?*"

His face was grim and even Eustacio shrank back from him. He knew that Sydnor would be as good or as bad as his word. Sydnor turned to Tom.

"How far've we got to ride?"

"Nearly forty miles."

"Pitch him on that horse an' rope his feet under the belly. Cut the bridle-reins an' put a lariat on the pony's neck. Now, Hardin, take the trail. If you try to run you'll have a race with a .25-30. Hit the trail."

There was no help for it. For the present at least the cards lay in Sydnor's hand. With a half-suppressed groan Tom swung his pony with his knees and forced him into the boulder-filled track just as the first faint flush of early dawn tinged the eastern hills.

His last glimpse of the camp showed him the pale, beautiful face of Helen Keene staring straight at him from the black triangle of the tent-door. Then Fidelio took the end of the lariat and Sydnor closed in behind on the trail, his cocked rifle resting easily across the pommel of his saddle.

IX

THAT day's ride was unspeakable torment to Tom. His own plight was bad enough. He was the only living person who knew the cañon in which Jewett's claim was located. He wished now that he had told Boyce. He had intended doing so but had overlooked the matter.

Sydnor had all the papers describing the claim but he could never find the cañon unless it were shown to him. There were too many cañons along that range.

He knew that after all that he had done Sydnor would not dare keep his word and release him. He would not dare take the risk. As long as either of the girls, Boyce or Patricio or he lived, Sydnor's party would face a penitentiary sentence.

Their chances, far away from civilization, where accidents could easily happen, were small. Sydnor's threat could be easily carried out: to take Patricio, Boyce and himself with the burros and drive them over the edge of the Rim Rock into that sheer abyss six thousand feet below. It would appear as an accident. It had happened before. As for the girls—he knew well enough what would happen to the girls. Men of Sydnor's stamp looked upon women in only one light.

Instantly his brain conjured up a picture, not of Cynthia Hazen, beautiful though she was, but of Helen; not as he had seen her last, her beauty framed in the yawning entrance of the tent-door, but as he had seen her in her own home in Palo Verde, lovely, graceful, winsome, her face a very kaleidoscope of changing emotions, as they had talked.

What a companion she had been! What a wife she would make to hearten a man to face the bitter trials that must come to all!

Suddenly he knew that in all the world Helen Keene was the one girl he had ever seen whom he wanted; not with the idle desire of man for a lovely companion but because she was the one woman who could round out his life; with whom he could do his best work.

He knew now; the sudden realization of it came with the quickness of a shrapnel-burst; that it had always been so from the beginning; that he had always been waiting and watching for just this: that all the long years of working from Alaska to Tehuantepec had been but a preparation for this.

There must be some way out of this mess. There must be! No misfortune could be so great but that brains and determination could find a way out, but—Helen was in the hands of those damnable Mexicans, who would obey every word of Sydnor's. At least Sydnor was here with him and he intended to keep Sydnor away from that camp as long as he could.

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From the flat where they had camped the trail led straight away to the northeast. The sun swung up over the long brown divide and the shadows shortened to the west. Mile after mile they put behind them; mile after mile of shifting sand and shimmering shale, red and blue and gray and black; the horizon swung to them under their ponies' feet and passed behind them in wale on wale of golden light.

A wide mirage of shifting surf swung to them from under the sun. It rolled onward and onward till the rush of the eddying water seemed lipping the shingle at his feet and his horse seemed about to tread in the silvery ripples. Then it rolled back, receding in ridge after ridge of shifting, silvery sand, in which his sweating pony sank fetlock deep at every step.

Twice his horse stumbled and fell. At the second stumble Tom was flung forward on his saddle-pommel. Only the fact that his feet were tied kept him from falling to the ground.

"Cut his hands loose," growled Sydnor. "We can't make time travelin' like this. Now—" as Tom swung his released hands to restore the circulation—"if you make one false move I'll plug you. Make no mistake about that. Where'd you bury Jewett?"

They had halted on a long, low ridge that gave a clear view of the land to the north and east and west. Quartering to the west a long, rugged range of hills two miles away cut off their view.

"Over there."

Tom swung his hand to the left.

"Do you know the land?" asked Sydnor.

"Yes. Prospectors have been here before."

"There'll be always prospectors enough to prospect —— if somebody'd grubstake 'em. Where's that grave?"

"See that *peloncillo* of red rock?"

Tom pointed to a needle-like rocky shaft that rose from the plain.

"He's buried about a hundred yards northwest of that. A child or a fool couldn't miss it. Go look."

"There's a time for all things. The ponies're footsore. We'll camp over yonder."

Sydnor pointed to a ledge of rocks that ran along the side of the cañon like a wall. His quick eye had caught sight of a green stain that meant water. Most men would have laughed at it, but Arizona is a land where men dig for wood and climb for water. Springs are found on hill-tops and men dig mesquite-roots for fuel.

They found a tiny spring on the hillside. A hundred feet above the spring a red scar showed where some optimistic prospector had in times past opened a shaft.

"Get up on the hill. Ride up to that old tunnel."

Sydnor's voice was threatening. He moved his rifle a little till the muzzle lay a scant ten feet from Tom's stomach. Tom promptly drove his pony up the hillside, expecting at every step to feel in his back the blow of a bullet.

The man who dug that prospect hole had cleared a little patch of ground and had sunk his shaft in workman-like style. Four feet by six the pit yawned at them.

It sank straight in the ground for thirty feet. Why the prospector had not gone thirty feet lower on the slope and drifted was a problem.

Across the pit a rude windlass stood, rope and bucket still hanging from the barrel. Sydnor looked at it for a moment; then his face cleared.

"Get offen that pony."

Tom had no choice but to obey.

"Now, Fidelio, get hold of that windlass. You, Hardin, git in that bucket. —— if I'm goin' to set up all night guardin' you when I got a handy cage like that waitin' fer you. Down you go. What?"

He construed Tom's expression of helpless rage as resistance. A bullet smashed into the ground at his feet.

"Git in that bucket, I say. The next one won't miss."

With anger deeper than words gnawing at his heart Tom climbed into the bucket and seized the rope while Fidelio slowly paid out the line. At the bottom Tom slowly climbed out and Fidelio wound up the rope. Sydnor leaned over the mouth of the shaft.

"I ain't aimin' to starve you. I'll send you down some grub an' water. Tomorrow you'll show me the way to that cañon."

TOM did not fail to note the exultant tone in his voice. It did not need that to harden his own resolve to upset the plans of the man. How that could be done he did not yet see, but there must be some way.

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He set his teeth as he noted his surroundings in the narrow shaft. He stood at the bottom of a narrow well thirty feet deep. At the bottom of the shaft a tunnel technically known as a drift ran into the bowels of the earth. For the first ten feet the tunnel, running through solid rock, was untimbered; beyond that it was timbered up with small logs.

A small pile of these logs lay near the mouth of the tunnel where the digger had left them when he stopped work. An old pick lay on an ore-heap with a broken shovel. Tom examined them carefully, for in his brain a plan had already begun to form.

While he sat there on the old ore-pile, his head in his hands, looking to Sydnor and Fidelio as they peered over the shaft-edge at him, the picture of despair, the bucket clattered down to the bottom of the shaft.

"There's your grub. Hurry up an' git it out or I'll upset it."

It was not much—a can of beans and another can of warm water—but it was more than he had expected. He ate his supper slowly; felt in his pocket for tobacco and papers and rolled a cigaret. Far above him Sydnor and Fidelio paid no more attention to him than they would have paid to a caged coyote. They knew that he could not escape without the rope.

"I guess we've got him rounded up all right, Fidelio. He can't git out of that pit."

"Not without wings, *señor*. What will you do in the morning?"

"How do I know yet? One thing is certain: He's got to show us that cañon. And then—he can't go back to Palo Verde to squeal on us; not till we're safe anyway."

"Mexico," suggested Fidelio, licking his sinful lips at the idea.

Across the southern line the money that he was to get on his return to Palo Verde would keep him for six months. Then too he was handy with rope and knife and branding-iron and could make a competence in Mexico.

He opened another can of beans and reached for the coffee-pot. Then he rose to his feet and stood suddenly at gaze, staring up the valley to the far northeast.

"Huh!" he said.

Sydnor too sprang to his feet and gazed, his look following Fidelio's pointing finger. There, far out on the flat desert, pitching and tossing across the sandy swales that resemble the swells of a rough sea, he saw suddenly the white top of a wagon. Beyond that was another—and another. He grunted.

"What in —— do you make of that, Fidelio? A travelin' circus?"

"No, *señor!* A wagon-train of some sort but—whence and whither bound? Emigrants nowadays, *señor*, do not travel in wagons. Today they come out rich and go home poor."

Fidelio grinned.

"Look again, *señor*."

"Wonder if it's a mirage?" muttered the unbelieving Sydnor.

"No, *señor*. If it was a mirage you could see the bushes through it. It is no mirage."

But Sydnor was already on his pony and was heading down the slope, riding to meet that wagon-train that had so unexpectedly risen out of the desert.

He checked at the foot of the slope and sat watching as the train drew nearer; five canvas-topped wagons drawn by mules and horses. Of women and children he could see no signs, but there were eight long lanky men with dreary eyes and lack-luster, anemic faces who urged the tired animals along.

Behind the train a small automobile toiled noisily in the wake of the last wagon. It was covered with red dust and looked even more tired than the mules.

When the driver of the first wagon saw Sydnor stop his horse at the foot of the hill he checked his jerk-line team and reached behind him for his rifle that lay ready to hand. Sydnor saw the movement and rode forward with his right hand upflung, palm out; the sign of peace the world over.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I take it that's none of your business."

The words were non-committal, the tone bellicose. They were eight to one and did not have to be polite.

"Who's in charge of your train, friend?"

"You got a friend here? That's good," said the driver truculently. "Jenson!"

He hailed the second wagon.

"Oh, Jenson! Here's a man wants to see you?"

At the name Jenson, Sydnor uttered an exclamation. Sydnor knew Eli Jenson as well as any man in the West knew him, and he knew, now that he heard Jenson's name, what the wagon-train was, even before the hail was answered.

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A tall, loose-jointed, shambling man whose face was masked behind a matted growth of hay-colored whiskers climbed slowly from the seat of the second wagon and came forward. He eyed Sydnor for a moment.

"Jenson—hello, Jenson. Don't you remember me?"

The man looked at him non-committally.

"Yes, I know you," he said presently. "You're Sydnor. Any water up there?"

He pointed to the spring that Sydnor had left, where Fidelio was filling an empty can.

"Yes, a little. How come you to know about that spring? It's out of the track of trains a bit. Here in the desert——"

"There is no desert to the People of the Lord. He leads us through deserts to the chosen land. We camp where we please and the Lord gives us water as He did when Moses smote the rock."

The man's tone was the affected whine of the religious enthusiast. Sydnor temporized.

"Come up to my camp on the hill," he said with forced geniality.

"We camp by ourselves. We have no dealings with the unbaptized Gentile. It is written——"

"The —— you don't! You've changed a whole lot then. Remember the faro layout in Ogden the Summer of ninety-eight?"

JENSON looked over his shoulder and shook his head as one shakes his head to get rid of an annoying insect. Sydnor grinned, drawing nearer so that his voice could be heard only by Jenson.

"Where you goin' to, Jenson?"

"I lead the wagons of the Saints of God across the line into Mexico where we can obey our laws and live in our own way."

"Where're your people then?"

"They have gone ahead of us. We could not ship our supplies by rail so we take them by wagon-train. Our people have gone by railroad."

Sydnor knew instinctively that Jenson told the truth. There are many little Mormon settlements in Northern Mexico, settled under exactly these conditions.

"How long will it take you to get there?" he asked.

"Perhaps a month. What does it matter? If Bishop Lee could live in that cañon yonder—" he swept his hand to the southeast toward the Grand Cañon of the Colorado—"in hiding from the accursed Gentile we can follow his example."

Jenson referred to the notorious Mormon bishop, John D. Lee, who after his participation in the Mountain Meadows massacre lived for months with an Englishwoman in the wildest recesses of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado till he was taken, tried and shot for murder.

Sydnor listened attentively. He knew that the exodus of the Mormons by this means was no new thing. The people went by rail as far as they could; their goods followed them by wagons that could cross the international boundary at any point they chose, undetected by the cavalry patrols that ride the line.

A plan suddenly formed in Sydnor's fertile brain. He thought quickly of the camp that he had left among the hills—of the women—especially he thought of Cynthia Hazen as he had seen her.

Why not find the ore-pocket that Jewett had found? Why not strip this pocket, get the ore and send it in to Mexico with Jenson? He was sure that Jenson would not delay his march for imaginary gold but—women; that was a different matter. Especially such women as Helen Keene and Cynthia Hazen.

"Look here, Jenson. You know me. You an' me want to do business. I've got a good business proposition to put up to you. Make your camp here on the flat and after dark I'll come down here to see you. It'll pay you good."

"Dealings with the Gentile—" began Jenson.

"Oh, ——! I know all about that. You'll be darned sorry later if you don't meet me. You want a good-lookin' young woman for your house, don't you? You need new blood in your breedin'. Be sure you meet me."

Sydnor rode back to his camp. He was certain of his man.

X

NO SOONER had Sydnor left Palo Verde with his party than both Darke & Wettin realized that they had been more than careless in their dealings with him. They knew he was a scoundrel. That was why they had employed him to take Jewett's papers from Tom Hardin.

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In a way it was due to their own carelessness that Sydnor had discovered the value of the papers. Once he knew the value of what he had stolen it seemed to them both that the wisest course was to bind him to them by the promise of a share of the profits from their scheme. Now that Sydnor with a second copy of the papers had gone on his mission what certainty had they that he would not double-cross them?

"Suppose—" Wettin stated the case to Darke as they sat in Wettin's room over a bottle of whisky obtained Heaven knows how—"suppose Sydnor does find the place. Suppose he locates the claim and locates it in his own name. We'll be stung, my friend."

"Of course—" Darke squirmed uneasily—"I thought of that. He wouldn't do that——"

"Why not? Too honest, I suppose. You know better. He wouldn't even have to come back here. He could leave this part of the country, go to Phœnix and file his claim with the inspector of mines in his own name. Then, Good-by, Darke & Wettin—like that!"

He spat out of the open window to show the completeness with which they would be eliminated.

"But what else could we have done?" asked Darke.

"What? What we are going to do now, my boy! We should never have let Sydnor get away without us. We're going to follow him now."

"But you don't know where he went," objected Darke.

"We can take my car. It's good enough for that. We can cross the river all right and hit the flat land on the far side and keep along the rim.

"If there's a trail we can follow it. Five ponies will leave a trail that can't be lost. Anyway there's the dog."

Wettin pointed to a great hound that lay beside the empty stove.

"He can follow a scent three days old."

"He'll need to," said Darke dryly. "What's the plan?"

"Just as I said. Cross the river just above here at the nearest place. There's a path all right. Strike the flat land on the other side and keep to the east a mile or so north of the Rim Rock. Both Hardin and Sydnor will have to travel by the water-holes.

"When we've gone a reasonable distance if we haven't struck his trail we'll take the Geological Survey map and head for water. We'll have to load up with gasoline and inner tubes, I reckon.

"We've got to do something. If we don't—well, to tell you the honest truth, the more I think of it the more am I convinced that for us Sydnor is more dangerous than Hardin. So far as we know Hardin is honest."

Darke grinned a little. It seemed peculiar to hear Wettin at this stage of the game apostrophizing honesty.

"Do you think the game is worth the candle?" he asked presently. "We're taking a chance already that can land us behind the bars in striped clothes if it is ever found out."

"Don't you see?" Wettin burst forth angrily. "That's just why we've got to keep on. If we fail now Sydnor'll squeal and we will never get clear of the charge. Accessory before the fact for highway robbery and claim-jumping. Looks well, don't it?"

"I mean, is the claim worth all this trouble?"

Darke was plainly skeptical.

Wettin looked at him for a moment in total bewilderment. Then his face cleared.

"If I should tell you what I know," he said slowly, "you'd put me down as a crazy man. I tell you if this scheme is carried through we are made men. Rockefeller'll be a poor hobo compared with us. Don't ask me—!" He raised a protesting hand as Darke strove for speech.

"Trust me in this matter. I will explain the whole thing later."

He went to a small iron safe and took from it a long envelope of coarse brown paper. It was sealed in four places with great splashes of sealing-wax and was strongly tied with cord.

"You see this?"

Darke nodded, his eyes on the envelope. Wettin thrust it into an inner pocket and buttoned up his coat.

"These papers explain everything. They represent the study of a thousand years—I fell heir to it. If anything happens you'll know where to find it."

"Explains what? What're you talkin' about?"

"No time now to explain. There's a time for all things. Let's get the car."

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IT TAKES time to prepare for even the most informal departure. It took them two busy hours to pack a half-dozen cans of gasoline in the machine; to lash a roll of blankets to the running board with a supply of provisions on the other side to balance it.

"Got a rifle? Here's mine."

"Yes. Put 'em both in the front seat. Ready?"

"All right. Let her go."

A moment later they were chugging out of Palo Verde heading northwest for the one place where Wettin knew they could cross the fifteen-mile chasm.

People say that there is no point west of the Crossing of the Fathers where that chasm can be crossed. This is an error. For miles and miles that Rim Rock stands up grim and forbidding.

For miles and miles the cañon is a mile deep and fifteen miles wide; but there are innumerable places where the quick Summer floods have washed away the lip of the gorge into long, easy slopes down which wagons can go; not to reach the bottom in one slant but to drop on a ten per cent. slope for a hundred feet, then to squirm and twist and back and fill, slipping, sliding, chocked up on one side while ropes hold up the other, till at last the bottom is reached.

Then comes a twisting, tortuous trail across the bottom-land, really no worse than any other untraveled trail, and the up-trip on the far side.

Where man has gone man can go and gasoline and machinery can do much that flesh and blood can not.

At one place they had to turn the machine, run a long line through a block and back to the rear axle, standing by with a guy-rope while the machine walked itself up the slope like a spider up its web, the two men taking up the slack.

It was late in the afternoon when they stood by the machine on the north side of the cañon.

"I'll say it was a man's job," Darke panted. "Now what? Camp here?"

"Not on your life! There's fifteen miles of daylight yet," Wettin replied, scrutinizing the car.

The engine was still working. Presently they were off on their search—only this time they were heading east.

Night found them in a clump of piñon-pines.

They were neither of them practised campers, but they made out to get supper and breakfast and again headed northeast. Time and again they came to impassable places in their course and had to turn back to seek another passage. But they averaged ten miles an hour, which is more than any horse can do.

They traveled on for hour after hour, dreading at every thud of the machine the accident that was more than due.

"I'll say it's a good machine."

Wettin grunted in answer. They had topped the long divide and were looking down over the flat, sandy waste to the northeast.

"Where the deuce are we anyway? Have you any idea?"

"It's a good place to find out."

Wettin shut off the engine and got out his map.

"Here. Catch hold of a corner."

He looked at his speedometer, checked off the miles, drew a piece of paper from his pocket, made a scale of miles, laying it on the map and sat considering it.

"Well?"

Darke was tired of spitting and rubbing his chin and of scraping his initials in the red dust.

"Well—where are we?"

"I figure we crossed Yellow Creek Cañon twenty miles back. We've got well away from the Cañon——"

"And still no sign of the trail," said Darke uneasily.

Wettin filled his pipe imperturbably.

"Rome was not built in a day."

"We ain't buildin' Rome. We're just roamin' around," wheezed Darke. "What's that over yonder?"

Wettin, still puzzling over his map, looked up irritably. The question seemed irrelevant. His vacuous gaze followed Darke's pointing finger.

Far away across the plain a mesa stood up in the crystal evening air, outlined as with ink against a turquoise sky. Behind them the sun was slowly dropping in a bed of purple clouds edged with gold; false harbingers of rain that would never fall. Southwest of that mesa a tall spire of rock rose like a needle from the plain.

"It's the western limit of the Painted Desert. Let's head over that way for a while. It really doesn't matter where we go. We've got water and grub. We're as

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likely to strike the trail in one place as in another."

Wettin was plainly despondent. Those fits frequently come to one in the boundless spaces of the Great West. They most surely follow moments of greatest optimism.

"Let's get to the top of the next ridge and camp there before darkness hits us."

The ridge was farther away than they had thought. Ten miles they traveled before the machine wheezed through clumps of long-dead buffalo-grass, stalks of dull-green *choya* and the menacing thorny *ocatilla*, to the top of the rise.

Wettin threw out his gear and killed his engine.

"Alabama," he said. "Here we rest."

"Rest ——!"

Darke, who had risen to get out, sprang to his feet on the seat and reached for the pair of binoculars that hung from the windshield.

"Look there, will you! You wanted a trail. You've struck the real thing at last. It looks like a traveling circus."

Wettin's eyes looked out where Darke pointed. Five miles away, clear and distinct in the last rays of the setting sun, low down in the distance, lay a white blur no bigger than a bean. He seized the glasses from Darke's resisting hand, screwed them to a new focus and leaping upon the radiator stared and stared.

"Wagons," he said at length wonderingly as if he could not believe his own eyes. "Wagons! Get on to that, will you! Five of 'em. Let's get over there and see what it means."

It was then that the long-deferred accident overtook them. Suddenly the engine ceased to pull; then it died and the machine with its two swearing occupants lay a blot on the gray face of the desert.

"It's carbureter or wiring, I suppose. We can't work at night. Let's stay where we are. Those wagons are five miles away."

Wettin unrolled their blankets while Darke opened some cans and presently, supper eaten, they bedded down under the stars.

XI

SITTING at the bottom of the shaft, Tom ate his supper, smoked his cigaret and rubbed his wrists, still stiff from the rope that had bound them. Inwardly he was aflame; outwardly he was collected, thinly disguising the all-consuming hot glow of anger that he felt.

It was more than anger; it was wrath. Anger is the fitful flare that licks across the surface; wrath is the deep-biting glow that lingers deeps in the ember-bed; that holds the all-destroying heat. At first Tom Hardin had been angry—now he was full of wrath.

Steadily but unconsciously his brain was working at a plan. First of all he must get out of that hole; then he must square matters with Sydnor. He counted the Mexican not at all; he had only done what he was bid. But Sydnor should pay a mighty price—the highest price that man can pay.

Very slowly the daylight died. While it was yet light with Sydnor and Fidelio it was dark with Tom in his hole thirty feet below them.

"Let's see. Let's take account of stock."

Tom looked about him in the growing dusk. His fingers felt the old pick and he stumbled over the pile of loose timbers left in the tunnel by the careful workman long ago.

He grinned appreciatively. Here was his ladder ready for him whenever he wanted to use it. But before he tried it he must be certain that all was clear at the top. He could not afford to take a chance that might betray him.

Very quietly he took up the old pick and carried it a few feet back in the tunnel. He dared not go far, for there might well be mephitic air in the place. One good breath of carbon monoxid and he would be done for.

He pried and twisted at the old pick till the head came suddenly loose, leaving in his hand the finest kind of club. He would not have to strike twice with that bit of white ash.

This done, he sorted carefully the pile of timbers, choosing the smallest. He finally selected four. These he carried noiselessly to the mouth of the tunnel and sat there for a while maturing his plan. It was characteristic of him that he considered it as already complete except for a few minor details.

"If they're sittin' at the top when I come up they can whack me on the head with a stick like killin' a snake."

He considered for a moment and took off his "chaps," rolled them into a ball and fastened them to the end of a light timber.

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Then he put his hat on top of the ball so that it bore a fair resemblance in the dusk to a man's head.

"Now!"

He looked at his watch.

"Nine o'clock. They should be asleep by now. I'll take a chance."

He slipped off his socks and gloves and cut the sleeves from his heavy undershirt. Then he placed a glove on each end of a timber, a sock on each end of another and the heavy sleeves on a third.

"Now! If they can hear me they've got ears as well as souls of coyotes. Now for it."

He took up a six-foot timber and placed it across the four-foot dimension of the shaft, jamming it fast against the walls about the height of his neck. Springing lightly upon this, he carefully placed a second timber in place above it but at right angles to it in the shaft. When he had placed the fourth timber in place he scrambled softly back to the bottom of the shaft, hung his pick-handle about his neck by his neckerchief and climbed back to his perch on the top timber.

"Four of 'em, three feet apart. That's twelve feet covered now. I'll only use two timbers from now on. I'd make too much noise with more."

Up he went like a lamp-lighter till he reached the upper stick. He paused on it long enough to tie a strip from his shirt to one end of the stick. Once astride of the top timber a slight pull on the string pulled up the one below him. Very gently he pulled it up and, handling it as gently as one would handle explosives, he placed it at arm's length above him, testing it by pull and weight before he moved from his seat. Then he untied the string, tied it about the stick he was sitting on, climbed to the one above and—pulled!

It was slow and tedious work, for as he got nearer to the top he had to be very careful that the sticks did not hit the wall. Also he had always to keep one hand under an end of the stick to keep stones and earth from falling. Long before he reached the top he had filled all his pockets and the breast of his shirt with loose shale. If it had fallen it would have sounded like a shot on a tin roof.

At four feet from the top the nervous and physical strain had him sweating like a startled horse.

The men were not asleep. He could hear the faint rumble of their voices in the night.

What should he do? If he stayed where he was either Sydnor or the Mexican might come to the shaft for a last look. If he climbed down again to wait he knew he would not be equal to the strain of a second climb.

He sat for a while pondering the question. Should he make a break for it or not?

Escape was not the foremost thought in his mind. First and last and all the time he felt that he must square matters with Sydnor.

Very gently he placed the stick two feet above him—it was in soft earth now—and lifted himself to it, sitting on the end that was in the deepest shadow. Then he listened again. This time he could distinguish a few words. The men were lying by a low-burning fire. Sydnor was speaking.

"I tell you, Fidelio, it's as good as done! They've got five wagons down there with them an' they're ready to pull out at daylight. I'm goin' down there now to meet Jenson to make the arrangements with him. He's their elder—he bosses the show. I've got a proposition to make to him that'll make his mouth water."

"About the man Hardin, *señor?* What will you do with him?"

Sydnor cursed spitefully.

"Leave him where he is. He's as safe as a flea on an Indian. Nobody'll touch him. He'll stay where he is till we want him. Three or four days without grub or water'll fix him so he'll eat right out of my hand.

"Stay here, Fidelio. I may bring Jenson back with me."

Fidelio asked a question that Tom could not hear. The answer came to him clearly enough.

"Five wagons an' an old automobile trailin' along behind 'em. We can use that machine. That's a part of my plan—I'll tell you later. I'll be back soon."

With his heart in his mouth Tom heard Sydnor's heavy boots crunch among the shale. There could never be a better time than now. Fidelio was alone in the camp, sitting by the fire of course. All Mexicans do that.

HE WAITED about three minutes longer; then he rose to his feet on the timber and wormed his way out over the lip of the shaft, crawling like a snake as he reached the open. Once up,

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he lay breathing hard, afraid to move lest the beating of his own heart should betray him.

A trampling behind him made him turn over quickly. He had been very nearly stepped on by Fidelio's pony. The startled animal gave a little jump and whinnied loudly.

Tom caught him by the hanging rein and crept to his off side. He was morally certain of what would happen.

That whinny brought Fidelio to his feet. In the desert a pony does not whinny for nothing. An American horse will do it when he is alone, but a pony does it only when he is scared. Fidelio knew it and feared his pony might stampede and leave him afoot.

"*Poco a poco Pintado*, (Take it easy, Painted One)."

He kept up a running fire of endearing terms till he should come in reach of that pony. Once the rein was in his hand the endearing terms would change to blistering expletives, but the Painted One did not know that.

Step by step, speaking gently as he came Fidelio drew nearer and nearer to the pony. When he was abreast of the animal the Mexican stretched out his hand to seize the rein, rose to his full height and——

A four-foot white-ash pick-handle whirled high over the withers of the Painted One and came down upon Fidelio's defenseless head. Followed a crash as of a breaking melon and Fidelio shut up like a deflated accordion. A long shadow passed to the near side of the pony.

"That's one. Spittin' on your hands always brings luck. Let's see what you've got."

His hands went to Fidelio's waist.

"H'm. A gun. An' that's all right. I'll take it just for luck. I wonder if you're dead. Afraid not! If I were a greaser like you I'd slip a knife into you to make sure."

He listened close to the man's lips.

"Not you! You'll be good for another hold-up."

A sudden thought came to him and he almost laughed aloud at it. Tying the pony to a bush, he carried the unconscious Fidelio to the mouth of the shaft and loosed the rope from the bucket.

"I can't tumble you down there, darn you, but I'll let you down in the bight of the rope. If you climb out like I did, you'll deserve to get loose."

He passed the bight of the rope under the man's arms and pantingly lowered him to the bottom, after which he drew up the rope.

"Now what? Who was Sydnor talkin' about when he said, 'He's got five wagons'?" Who's got five wagons? Hello! What's that?"

His eye caught the shifting twinkle of fires far out on the flat.

"Now what in the world does that mean? By Jove——"

At that particular moment one of the Mormon teamsters flung an armful of the dead stalks of Spanish bayonet on the fire. The bright flame flared up instantly like burning oil and Tom saw, silhouetted against the background of the desert, a wagon—then another—and another.

He whistled under his breath and stood at gaze. What should he do? Who were these people?

Strong within him was the impulse to take Fidelio's horse and gun and make a run for it. Instantly he gave up that plan. He had not yet seen Sydnor face to face.

He could not stay now to meet him, that was certain, for Sydnor was apparently among friends. First of all he must find out who they were.

Those years of desert life, months of experience in moving at night in the open, stood in good stead. A city-bred man would have fallen a score of times where Tom passed like a cloud-shadow over wheat. Always keeping in the deepest shadow, he moved steadily down the slope till he came within fifty yards of the fire. There was no one near it but, as he watched, he saw Sydnor stride out of the night. He was followed by a tall, shambling man whom Tom had never seen before.

Tom shifted his newly acquired pistol to the middle of his back so that it should strike no rock, lay prone upon the earth and moved forward a foot or two. Between him and the fire stood a paririe-dog mound that threw a triangle of blackness toward him. Inch by inch he worked his way toward it and lay at last within fifteen yards of the two men. Sydnor kicked the burning brush together and spoke. He was continuing a conversation.

"There ain't no chance in it I tell you, Jenson. It's cut an' dried. You've already moved your families down into Mexico by rail. In three weeks' time you'll have your

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wagons across the line. You've got five wagons and an automobile.

"I'm on a private layout that may pan big. I think it will. I've got four Mexicans back in the desert forty miles with the two women I told you about.

"They're tryin to head me off in this deal of mine. I want 'em taken away—don't look at me like that, you ol' goat! There's two of 'em, I say. One's mine. Remember that!

"Send your automobile to the camp an' git the women. Take 'em with you across the line. You can do what you please with the little one. The big one's mine. You want women, don't you?"

Jenson looked at him even-eyed. The old, shifting look was gone from his eyes, into which had come a light that was not good to see. Tom listened breathlessly.

"I hear you, Sydnor. I know you and I don't trust you a foot. But I will send my machine the forty miles you speak of.

"If you have told me the truth I will deal with you. If you have two such women as you tell me of—why, I'll take one of 'em for you, me keepin the other fer my own heifer. I need one. If my men bring the girls we will talk further.

"There are few of us left who hold the old faith. We were told—those who came with me from Denmark—that we would find homes for the making and women for the taking. One can not farm without water nor breed without heifers. Two, you say?"

"Two; one fer you. Such women as you have never even seen outside of San Francisco. You'll send for them then."

"I'll send the machine at daylight."

"My God!"

The words formed in Tom's brain like a prayer. So that was the plan!

Instinctively his hand went to his gun. He could drop them both in their tracks; but after that? There were a half-dozen others.

"Come back to the wagon with me."

Jenson was moved to unusual hospitality.

"We use no liquor ourselves, but we carry some to trade with the Gentiles as we move south. I will find a little."

"I'll go you."

Sydnor followed him toward the wagons. Tom lay on his face in the shadows, his brain working like a surcharged battery.

SHE COULD not believe the evidence of his senses. Such a proposal as he had just heard was worthy of savages, but not of white men in the twentieth century.

He had lived long among the Mormons and he knew the bulk of them for sober, law-abiding tillers of the soil, leaders of the simple life. He knew too that every Mormon is a potential missionary, and he knew the only kind of Gospel that would appeal to men like Jenson.

The man would do exactly as he had agreed to do. Unless he could stop him, Helen—his brain almost cracked at the horror of it—and Cynthia Hazen would be seized, brought to that wagon-train and kept with it till it should pass into Mexico. What would happen there Tom knew only too well.

For a brief moment his blood ran cold. Then hot wrath swept over him like a flow of molten lava. Quick-swelling anger subsides as quickly. This was abiding wrath; for he pictured Helen as he had seen her first in the office of Darke & Wettin, then as he had seen her later; her physical beauty; her charm; her mental attractiveness—— No! He could not sum her up!

Of Cynthia Hazen he thought too, but she was always an attribute of Helen. He felt again for his pistol and backed carefully away from the wedge of shadow.

There was but one thing to do and that was so obvious that it needed little thought. Sydnor's ponies were tired out after forty miles of desert travel. They could do no more. There were no horses with the wagon-train, but there was that automobile that Jenson had planned to use at daylight. He must get that machine—and at once.

He worked his way back along the flanks of the wagons. The men, drowsing on their blankets, did not hear a sound. The mules, standing four to a wagon, stamped and jangled their chain-halters noisily.

Tom backed off, rose to his feet and walked down the line of the train. Behind the last wagon he saw Sydnor talking with Jenson and another man.

The automobile was near them. As he watched, the third man got in the car and switched on the lights, turning on the engine. It racketed and roared for a moment; then he shut it off.

"See," said Jenson hoarsely. "She works. Got plenty of gasoline?"

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"Forty gallons, an' the tank's filled."

"That's good. I'll take it myself at daylight. Wake me up before first light. You better camp here with us, Sydnor, an' go with me in the mornin'."

"No. I got to get back to my camp. I've got a reason."

They walked back together. Tom saw them stop by the fire and talk. Then as quietly as a shadow moves he climbed into the machine, felt for the levers and sat for a moment with compressed lips and fast beating heart.

In that moment he prayed so earnestly that he could almost hear his thoughts. He seemed to be shouting aloud.

Rapidly he tried to visualize that plain to the southeast. He must travel in the darkness till he should be miles out on the prairie. Sydnor's ponies could not pursue and—he had a gun.

He felt about him suddenly and his hand struck a rifle-barrel. At the cold, reassuring touch his heart almost missed a beat from sheer delight. He hung his hat over the light and turned on the current. All was right in the car.

When Sydnor should leave for his own camp Tom would try to get away. If the plan failed he would begin shooting—Jenson first for Helen's sake, then Sydnor—after that it should be a free-for-all.

"Remember, you ol' goat, the big girl's mine. She's sealed to me, as you people say. See you in the mornin'."

Instantly Tom bent forward, threw off brakes, turned on the full power and threw in his gear.

Would that car never start! It seemed petrified. The full roar of the engine wiped away the silence. The men by the fires started to their feet. Jenson looked at them astounded.

"You, Pete—whar's Pete Long? Who all's monkeyin' with that engine?"

Sheer surprize held them for a moment. In that moment the car leaped forward and turned sharply to the right.

As Tom cleared the train a man sprang at the car. It was Pete racing for the automobile. He knew that something had gone wrong; but what?

He leaped for the running-board, but Tom's left hand caught him in mid-air. He crashed to earth and lay still. At the same moment the gear-lever raked back and then forward into high, and the car leaped forward and raced along the empty plain.

One-two-three hundred yards he went before realization came to them. It was two full minutes before a long spark lit the night and a spiteful crack was followed by the snap of a rifle-ball passing high overhead.

Tom plunged on into the night.

XII

EUSTACIO had carried out literally Sydnor's orders.

Old Peter Boyce and Patricio, their hands tied with strips of rawhide, lay under a mesquite-bush. Their feet too were fastened with strips cut from an old grain-sack, and a pock-marked Mexican watched them jealously.

The piled rifles of the guard lay in a heap by the roots of a big mesquite-bush where their saddles were stacked. They were in the heaven of a Mexican peon—food at hand and nothing to do in a hot place. Given a half-inch of annual rainfall and hell would be paradise to a Mexican.

The other men lolled about the camp, watching every movement of the two girls. Cynthia came out of the tent and, finding no harm followed, went back for Helen. Eustacio came forward sullenly.

"What does this mean?" demanded Cynthia angrily.

"*Quien sabe?*"

He shrugged his shoulders.

Helen put the question in Spanish.

"*Quien sabe?*"

Again his shoulders lifted, but when the two girls walked toward Mr. Boyce, whom they had just discovered, Eustacio was before them, speaking English volubly.

"You keep in the tent and away from those men and no harm will come to you."

Helen stepped forward angrily, paying no attention to him. Instantly his manner changed. He seized her by the arm and whirled her about so that she nearly fell.

"It is an order, *señorita*," he began.

"I give orders in this camp."

Helen's voice was hot with passion.

"Not now, *señorita*. My boss is boss here. While he is away I give orders. See now, he told me to allow neither of you to talk to those men. I can not touch either of you, but if you do not obey me I will——"

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He drew his knife and bared his yellow teeth in an ugly grin. They drew back in fear.

"No—no. Not for you, *señoritas*. But if you do not obey my orders I will slit his ears like a sow."

He motioned to Mr. Boyce, who was struggling to rise.

"What does it mean, Mr. Boyce? What does this outrage mean?"

Helen's voice was shrill with fear. Before his guard could head him off Peter Boyce boomed out:

"That 'ere Sydnor's at the bottom of it! They carried Tom away——"

A filthy paw shut down across his mouth.

For a second he meditated biting it, but in time he remembered that the man was a Mexican.

Astounded and perplexed, the two girls went back to their tent, where they sat staring wide-eyed at each other.

"What in the world does this mean?" demanded Cynthia. "I have heard of hold-ups. Is this one?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear! I'm sorry to have brought you into this!"

"Well, you needn't be. What does it mean? Tell me that."

Helen told what she knew and what she suspected.

"They have held up the camp and have taken Tom—Mr. Hardin, I mean—away because he is the only one who knows where the cañon is. Don't you see? They won't hurt us—they will not dare. But—Oh, what have they done to—to—him?

"That awful man Sydnor's at the bottom of the whole thing," went on Helen. "I told you all about how he robbed Tom of the papers and now he and his Mexican have got Tom in their power. They have arms and he has none. Oh——"

She burst suddenly into tears. Not the loud weeping that is the safety-valve for disordered nerves, but the racking sobs of deep sorrow and unassuaged grief.

Cynthia Hazen looked at her friend for a brief moment, then she took her very tenderly in her arms. Instinctively she knew that Helen Keene was not weeping for any one in that camp that day.

"Is it Tom?" Cynthia asked.

Helen nodded wordlessly and stood for a moment in the ring of Cynthia's arms. Then words came:

"Oh," she said suddenly, "I don't know what to do or say. I'll give them all the papers if they'll let him go and bring him back to us. Let's tell them that."

She started for the tent-door. Cynthia stopped her. Her eyes were very bright and her lips were firm.

"Wait, my dear," she said gently. "There is no one outside to whom you can make your offer. Even if there were, still—I advise you to wait."

"Wait! Wait? When every moment may be too late? All the mining claims in the world are not worth his little finger."

"Unless I am very much mistaken, my dear, your Mr. Hardin is the very last man in the world to compromise with a set of scoundrels such as these men are. Wait a little and see what will happen."

They settled down to a long hot day. Twice a dirty Mexican guard reluctantly brought them water, and all day long the sun streamed relentlessly down on that hot stuffy little tent till they could hardly endure the baking interior.

But it was better than being outside, where they would have had to endure the sight of Mr. Boyce and Patricio, as well as the questionable glances and guessed comments of the men who eyed the girls covertly at every opportunity.

There was no help for it. They suffered in silence, very sure that night or the next day would bring Sydnor back to camp, when they would know what was to happen.

Night drew down cold and windy. They had little fuel, so the two girls went to their blankets early. By ten o'clock the camp was as still as the dead, save for an occasional stamp from a restive horse.

WHILE Helen and Cynthia were striving for warmth in their tent where they had nearly blistered all day, Tom was heading southeastward on the wildest ride that he had ever undertaken.

That one rifle-shot brought Sydnor back to the camp in ten jumps. A quick count of the men in the train showed that all were present.

Sydnor broke for his camp at a run. He found his two ponies, his own loose, Fidelio's tied to a bush; but of Fidelio there was no sign.

He made a hurried examination of the camp. Net result—nothing.

Astounded, he ran over to the mouth of

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the shaft. The bucket was in place but the rope was untied. He picked up a burning stick from the fire and, whirling it into flame, thrust it over the pit-mouth.

One glance at the timbers that Tom had left in place told him the story. His prisoner had escaped!

Cursing till his tongue almost blistered, he stood above the shaft.

"What? Where?"

Of course the man who had escaped with the machine had been Hardin! He had got away! He would head back for the old camp where the girls were. Barring accidents he would reach it in three, perhaps two, hours; for the moon was already half-way up the eastern sky.

What could he do? His ponies were tired out and Hardin might have arms—he did not know. Where was Fidelio?

As he stood pondering between curses, the burning end broke from his torch and fell down the shaft. It struck one of Tom's timbers half-way down and fell in a thousand sparks. They too fell and struck bottom and——

That was a groan!

He listened again and there was no mistaking it. It was either Hardin or Fidelio.

He ran back to the fire, raked the embers into a glow and, picking up an armful of brush, held it down till it was aflame. He dropped the lighted mass down the shaft. As it struck the bottom a groaning, huddled mass straightened out and a deep groan came to him.

"Fidelio!" he shouted.

"*Señor?*"

The answer seemed delayed for years.

Then Sydnor said other things, pointed, pungent things that gave a complete and perfect history of Fidelio, his forebears and ancestors to the fourth generation from every point of view. After that he lowered the bucket and hauled Fidelio up.

"Well, all I've got to say is you sure look like a railroad wreck."

He scanned the wreck that stood before him.

"What hit you?"

"I do not know, *señor*. My horse was loose and I went to catch him when—something hit me.

Sydnor walked over to the horse and stumbled over the pick-handle.

"Here's what hit you!"

He picked it up.

"If you'd ever had any brains they'd have been knocked out. Of all the fools I've ever seen——"

The second volume of the life of Fidelio followed.

Exhausted at last, Sydnor turned away.

"Stay here and look after the horses," he growled. "I'll be back in a little bit."

He found the camp alive, the Mormons as angry as hornets well stirred up.

Jenson listened sourly to Sydnor's explanation.

"You must be a pair of fools! Two of you can't keep one man down a thirty-foot hole. And now I've lost a machine. Bring them horses down and we'll trail that machine as soon as it's light enough to see. He's got forty gallons of gasoline with him, but he may break down. If the machine don't break down, it'll be the first trip she ever took without doin' it. We've got to wait till daylight——"

So down they sat by the fire and waited. Sydnor and Fidelio brought the horses from the hill and rubbed them down carefully. When the first gleam of pearly light shot over the eastern mesa all ten men were astir.

To find the track of the machine was easy enough; to follow it was easier, for in those first two miles Tom had simply gone straight ahead at full speed on the old hunting maxim, "Over, under or through."

He had left a six-foot trail behind him that showed among the scrubby mesquite and Spanish bayonet like a new-cut road.

"Go ahead with the horses. I'll put some of our men on our mules and follow you. Make the best time you can."

In a few moments six men were away with Sydnor, moving rapidly among the brush. On across the flat they went. At the top of the first rise Sydnor checked his pony, stared hard toward the southeast and uttered a yell that echoed back through the camp. The men flocked eagerly to him. He was almost inarticulate with excitement, and profanity flowed from him like a flood as he pointed.

"There! There! See there! By——," we've got him. He's broke down."

The pearly mist lifted from the bottomland as the sun rose, and there under the belting opal of the morning sky stood out a black automobile some three miles away.

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Horses and mules, riders and men afoot, swearing and vowing vengeance, tore across the plain and swarmed about that broken-down machine.

A man lying flat on his back with both hands deep in the bowels of the machine turned over and looked at them. Then he slowly backed out, rose and wiped his hands on his trousers. Another man rose from a seat beside the machine and showed his face over the top of the door.

Sydnor stopped his pony with a jerk that threw him back on his haunches.

"Darke!" he shouted. "Darke! And Wettin too! You've come in the very nick of time."

"What's happened, Sydnor?"

Sydnor drew him aside and told him categorically, suppressing only the plan for the abduction of the girls that he and Jenson had made.

"We've got to catch up with him now," he urged. "You see that! He's stole a machine an' if he ever gets back to Palo Verde our cake is all dough. We got to catch him to save our own skins.

"Let's take your machine—you an' Darke and Jenson an' me. We can catch him before he can do anything in that camp where we left the women. Jenson, send these other fellows back to watch the wagon-train. We don't need 'em now; four against one is good enough odds."

With a nod Jenson dismissed his followers.

"I'll drive the machine back to camp," he said.

"Hurry up! For God's sake, hurry up!" cried Sydnor in a frenzy. "It means ten years behind the bars if we don't settle this thing at once."

Sydnor's face was pale and he was sweating, though the day was cold.

Wettin motioned to the others to get in the car.

"We'll have your car back for you in two hours," Sydnor muttered to Jenson. "And we'll fix up that deal of ours too."

The Mormon elder nodded grimly as the car shot forward along the new-made track.

XIII

THAT was the wildest night of Tom's life. Often before he had taken chances. He had galloped over prairie-dog towns where a misstep would have meant a broken neck; he had ridden a balky mule down the slopes of the terrible Andean *quebradas;* even across the liana bridges. Now his memory raced back to these and he considered them as trifles as he settled himself in his seat and braced himself as his machine crashed into the first big bush.

After that it was bump, rumble, jump and jar for mile after mile at racing speed that almost lifted the crazy car from earth.

"Iron and steel can't stand it," muttered Tom, nursing his engine up a steep slope.

The car teetered on the crest and dived down the far slope like a cow going downhill.

"I never knew how devout I am—I sure do believe in a Great Creator—of automobiles. He's done some job! Twenty miles since we left an' that's only forty minutes ago. I wonder what Sydnor'll say!

"I guess I can shut down now for a little while. They've only got the Mormons' mules and the worn-out horses that Sydnor has—an' Fidelio's out of business. I reckon I'll turn on my lights an' travel like a white man.

"First of all what am I goin' to do? I can't think while I'm crossin' country like this."

He knew where his old camp lay; perhaps an hour's ride to the southeast in the main valley in which he was traveling.

"If I keep going I'll hit 'em by one o'clock in the mornin'. Just in time to spoil the beauty sleep of those greasers.

"He left four men with Eustacio. All right so far—Peter Boyce an' Patricio and me; that's three. The surprize an' pleasure of havin' me drop in on 'em 'll be worth three more. By Jove! I'll arrange the biggest surprize of their lives for 'em. Let's go!"

Once more he drove forward over the soft, untraveled flat, but this time with greater care. He was in no especial hurry now, and as he went plan after plan flashed through his mind.

First was the feeling that once he should have cleared that camp of Mexicans he must get Helen and Cynthia back to Palo Verde at once. They would never be safe with men like Sydnor and Jenson at large. There was time yet. What was that?

It was just a long flash that jumped from the black expanse of the plain, but it had been caused by Eustacio, who had flung

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on the fire a great armful of sun-dried *choya*.

At most that camp could not be more than a mile away.

Perhaps they had heard him. He hastily shut off his lights, backed down the ridge and as quietly as he could moved south along the slope, keeping the ridge between himself and the camp. He wished to approach it from the south.

The chugging of the engine should have betrayed him, but a great wind was blowing across the valley and it was heavy with that booming, resonant roar that one hears in empty places.

Two miles south and he turned. When in the very center of the valley where he could plainly see the fire he threw on all his power and drove straight for the camp exactly as he would have ridden down a *vaquero* in a *combate de caballos*.

He was morally certain that the Mexicans would run true to form, and that the surprize and the machine would stampede them.

He was right.

They did not hear the car till it was within two hundred yards of them. Tom pressed down his gas control. The full roar of the engine woke the sleeping camp. The car jumped like a horse.

The startled sentry sitting by Mr. Boyce and Patricio sprang to his feet as the two headlights centered on him. At his scared yell the others came to life. They jumped from their blankets and for a brief moment stood astounded.

The glare of the lamps in their eyes held them as a torch holds a deer.

That half-minute was long enough for Tom to spring from the car as it crashed to a halt. His cocked rifle swung from man to man as each moved.

"Move—just one of you move—just an inch. I don't care who does it. Just move."

His voice was soft and almost polite. As one man they declined his request.

Instantly their arms had shot heavenward as if they had all been on one wire. Mr. Boyce sat up under his bush and fairly yelled with delight.

"Go to it, son! Go to it! Hello, the tent there! Miss Helen!"

"Yes—yes!"

The voice came from the tent. The tent-door opened and both Helen and Cynthia appeared, excited, frightened and very beautiful.

"Oh!"

Helen ran forward.

"Wait!"

Tom's voice was still soft.

"Miss Helen—be quick, please. Cut those men loose."

He motioned with his chin to Mr. Boyce and Patricio.

Helen took the knife that he tossed her and set to work to cut the rawhide strips that bound their hands. In two minutes the men were loose. They stamped and rubbed to restore their circulation. Mr. Boyce flung forward stiffly.

"What're you aimin' to do with these here men, Tom? I'll start in on this one for choice. He struck his dirty paw over my mouth today. He tasted like a horse smells."

Mr. Boyce kicked him very thoroughly and completely from all sides.

The man cringed and knelt abjectly. Mr. Boyce, excited by his success, started in on the second man.

"Here! Hold on, Pete! Enough's as good as a feast. What'll we do with 'em? Take all their hardware. Frisk 'em."

In a trice Mr. Boyce and Patricio had gone through the men for knives. They had no pistols; they had been armed with only their rifles. These were still piled near the saddles on the other side of the camp.

"What now?" demanded Tom. "Eustacio?"

"*Señor*."

Eustacio came forward cringingly. He knew when he had enough.

"How long will it take you to get out of here?"

"Five minutes, *señor*."

"Take your grub an' your ponies an' hit the southward trail! Get out at once. If I see you again I'll shoot to kill."

"Our guns, *señor*? We can not live without game."

"Die then. Am I a fool to give you arms? You've got now a better chance than your boss gave me. If you're here in three minutes we'll begin shootin'."

Eustacio believed him. In less than that time every man was astride his tired pony and was spurring rapidly southward.

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"NOW"— Helen drew nearer— "Tom—I—we want an explanation."

Perhaps it was the fire-light; perhaps it was something else, but Helen's face was warm with color as she looked Tom Hardin evenly in the eyes.

In terse, nervous sentences Tom told what had happened. When he came to Sydnor's plan with Jenson he stopped short.

"And then they planned to come back here in Jenson's machine to take you—and you—" he nodded to the two girls—"and to take you away so you couldn't testify against them."

He let it go at that. They looked satisfied. They could never have guessed the truth.

Mr. Boyce looked steadily at Tom. He knew men of Sydnor's stamp, and he knew how they reacted at sight of a beautiful woman—especially when that woman was in their power.

"What was they plannin' to do with me?" he asked politely. "I s'pose they know'd I'd never be so rude as to tell on 'em an' they was goin' to let me go. Hey?"

Tom grinned.

"I reckon, Pete, that you an' I would have been reported 'struck by lightning'. Anyway, that's all fixed now. With this stolen machine we can get back in two or three days. Are you ready?"

During all this time Helen Keene had said no word. She took Tom's flippancy for its exact worth. She had heard men like Tom talk under stress of excitement before. She turned at his words.

"We came here to do a certain thing, Mr. Hardin. We have not yet done it. How far are we from the cañon where Mr. Jewett's claim is located?"

Tom looked at her. Clean admiration showed in his eyes.

"It is about five miles from where I was. About forty from here as the crows fly."

"Them crows is —— fools then," said Mr. Boyce testily.

Helen went on:

"You know—we all know—that if we go back now with the work undone we will never come back to do it. For pity's sake, let's go on and do what we came for."

Cynthia looked at her astounded. She had not expected this from Helen, but she nodded grave approval.

"It can only take two days more," Helen continued. "We have a machine, food and water. Let's go! We can push on rapidly in the machine and Patricio can follow us with the ponies and the burros with the equipment. Can't he?"

"He's been doin' it fer twenty years," said Mr. Boyce acidly. "But you're plumb right, young lady. I hate to lose a bet. Patricio can take one of the rifles them scoundrels left behind 'em.

"He'll work along the foot of the range to the left of the valley. It's easier travelin' along the base of the hills. It'll keep him out of the deep sand. He'll go along the base of the range till he crosses our wheel-tracks goin' up one of the cañons. By doin' that he'll be safe. If any one follers us, they'll track the machine. He'll be safer'n we are."

"All right. Come on then," Helen cried.

They piled in to the machine; Mr. Boyce and Cynthia in the rear seat, Helen by Tom in front; and as the stars were beginning to pale in the east they headed northwestward up the valley.

"Can you see?" asked Helen wonderingly, noting how Tom with a deft touch would just miss a thorny *ocattila*-stalk or a bean-laden mesquite-bush.

"No. Prospectors have a sixth sense. Haven't you ever crossed a dark room and stopped suddenly to find the edge of a door waitin' for you? You don't know what made you stop. Neither do I know what made me turn.

"That's the way I feel tonight. Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong. All ahead of us now is all right."

They rocketed and roared across the sandy waste. Sunup found them within five miles of the sharp *peloncillo* of red stones near which Tom had scraped Ben Jewett's lonely grave.

"No use stoppin'. Ol' Ben's still dead," commented Mr. Boyce. "Git on, Tom."

"He told me I'd find a dead burro by the mouth of the right cañon," said Tom.

Again the machine plunged forward across the low ridges of sand.

They were running paralled to the western range now, and cañon after cañon opened out upon the plain exactly as the ribs open out from a spinal column. Far up among the higher slopes those cañons were filled with pine and spruce and chestnut-trees that changed into live-oaks and sycamores along the creek-beds.

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"It ain't that one—an' it ain't that."

Tom checked off cañon after cañon as they worked past them.

"Wait! There's somethin'. What is it?"

A white spot showed like a blister on the dusty face of the desert. Tom headed toward it.

"Looks like a burro undressed an' left his bones there," commented Mr. Boyce. "Only a burro'd be ass enough to leave his bones around keerless like that. What you goin' to do now?"

"That's the cañon," commented Tom, turning his machine up the gully. "I don't know where we're goin', but——"

With unprecedented temerity he dropped his hand over Helen's and frankly pressed it as he worked the machine carefully between the rocks.

XIV

PATRICIO easily followed their trail across the desert. He plodded along it at a patient two-mile-an-hour gait. Men adopt it who follow burros in the Southwest. It is an ideal gait for a Mexican.

Other eyes besides Patricio's saw that trail. The driver of a machine that came plunging out of the north when the sun was an hour high saw it. They came roaring down a long sandy slope into the center of the valley and Wettin, gazing low and to the right, slowed down and threw in his brake.

"Yonder is a track," he said suddenly. "And here's another."

Instantly four men were out of the car scanning the wheel-tracks. Clearly the trail was not the one they had been following.

Either the machine they were following had gone down the valley and then turned and run in a new direction or else it was a new machine. Either was bad. What should be done?

It was Jenson, hunting far afield, who gave them the solution.

"Both sets are made by my machine," he said positively. "He's turned and is goin' northwest."

"How do you know? Only a fool'd do that. It don't seem likely——"

"There's a little leak in my oil-tank," said Jenson dully. "I had the tank put in on the right side instead of the left. It ain't a bad leak but it drips a little every now an' then.

"Back there I seen a splash on the right side. Here it is again. It's my car all right."

"They turned up there."

Darke pointed up the cañon where Tom had turned to the left.

THEY were about two hours behind the other car. Tom had pushed the rackety machine as far up the cañon as he had dared go with it. Tom's party got out and gazed about them.

That cañon had narrowed to a deep V. Both walls ran up steeply for several hundred feet, where they rose suddenly in a sheer wall that was crowned with live oaks. Down the center of the cañon a narrow thread of white sand edged with willows meandered.

"A creek, a typical Arizona creek. There's water," said Mr. Boyce. "You'll find it in pools then it'll drop out of sight."

Tom nodded. He was studying the soiled note-book that Ben Jewett had given him.

"Yes—" he gave a sudden whoop of delight— "an' there's the spring."

He pointed to a little blot of green below a rock.

"And there's the iron bolt that Jewett told of."

It was only an old railroad spike driven into a cleft in the rock, but it was sufficient.

"Come on now! Follow me close."

He again consulted the note-book.

"Listen—in the middle of the claim there's a spring of salt water. Take a look at that patch of sand, Pete. Grass won't grow by a salt spring."

Mr. Boyce, hat in hand, ran to the patch of gravel. He put some of the water to his lips.

"It's as salt as Lot's wife," he shouted, spitting like an angry cat. "Now what?"

"Good!"

Tom had no compass. He oriented himself by his watch.

"North twenty steps from the salt spring."

He paced it off, the others watching every movement.

"Then turn northwest—that's over there—an' go sixty-one short steps."

He paced it off, counting laboriously, Mr. Boyce checking him loudly.

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"Then turn north and go seven. Here we are."

He looked about him perplexed.

"What now?" said Mr. Boyce. "Go on. That ain't no continued story. Go on."

"'Go seven and you'll find it. I put it in a can,'" read Tom slowly.

"What in ——! Excuse me, ladies.

"What did he put in a can? Peaches?" demanded Mr. Boyce.

"Whatever it was, there's the can," he said suddenly.

He plunged into the scrub and came back bearing in his arms an old coal-oil can that had been painted red and that had a handle of wire attached to it.

They made a rush for him and gathered about him as he set it down.

"What is it?" demanded Helen breathlessly.

"Heavens knows," said Mr. Boyce piously, his head filling the mouth of the bucket. "There's a package in here."

He dragged at something.

"It looks like a dead cat, but it ain't."

He pulled it out. It was a piece of antelope-hide tied with a thong. Inside this was a piece of brown canvas that was very dirty from long use. When this was unfolded a small tobacco-sack fell out. Tom opened it carefully.

It contained perhaps two tablespoonfuls of a curious-looking red sand and two small rusty nails wrapped up in it.

"He was as crazy as a loon," said Tom slowly. "Plain brown gravel!"

He emptied the contents of the sack into the palm of his hand, then put it back and placed the sack in his pocket.

Mr. Boyce shook his head. Plainly the weak-minded wanderings of old Ben Jewett were beyond him.

"There's a cut over there," he said suddenly.

He pointed to a red scar on the steep face of the cañon-bank almost straight up from where they stood.

"It looks like the old man done a power o' work over there. It won't take long to see what he meant. Let's go take a look."

They scrambled up to the cutting. It was exactly like any other prospect-hole to be found on almost any hillside in Arizona; simply a drift cut in the steep face of the hill. It ran straight back into the hill for perhaps twenty feet and terminated in a tiny room, part of which had been timbered up with small poles.

Mr. Boyce peered over Tom's shoulder.

"Go on in," he said. "There can't be any gas there. It's an open cut. Here's a flashlight."

Mr. Boyce pushed past Tom and punched vigorously at the clay wall with his rifle-butt. The wall crumbled away into a mass of falling red gravel that rattled to the floor like a handful of small shot.

With Helen and Cynthia pushing close behind him staring wide-eyed at all they saw, Tom entered the cut. Very carefully they moved forward. Tom heard a sudden cry from Mr. Boyce.

"My God, Hardin! Look here!"

There was more than astonishment in his voice. There was an undercurrent of disbelief and of unacknowledged fear.

Tom instantly crowded forward to where the old man stood, and all of them stood looking over his shoulder. Their eyes followed his shaking forefinger that pointed to a spot in the rock-face at the end of the heading.

The spot was no larger than an orange. It was an empty pocket that old Jewett had worked out when he was last in there.

A dozen tiny lines of yellow gold radiated from it, running up the rock-face like the strands of a golden cobweb, all centering in the empty pocket!

"Well!" Tom gasped.

"I don't mean that. Do you see anything else?"

The old man's finger still pointed waveringly at something. Tom suddenly saw what it was.

An old pick-head still lay in the pocket. It rested on one point; the other point rested against the rock-face. All the iron of the pick-head that had been exposed to the air was red with rust; but the point for two inches from the place where it stood in the now empty pocket was of dull gold!

Mr. Boyce held Tom back by main strength.

"Don't touch it," he almost shouted. "Don't touch it. Don't you see what it is?"

"I'll be —— if I do!"

Helen and Cynthia never heeded the oath. They had caught fire from the old man and their hearts were in their mouths as they listened.

"He said he had found the Mother Lode! The place where gold grows! The place

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where Nature makes it! Do you see how those veins in the rock-face run out from a common center? Why? They was forced out from a common center by a common force—that's why!

"That gold was made in that pocket there, and when the force got strong enough it was forced out through the veins just like the heart throws the blood out along the arteries. Look at that pick-head!"

Tom took the tool from Mr. Boyce's trembling hand. The light was not good where he stood. He stepped back to the mouth of the drift.

Something, it may have been a falling rock, made him look up and out across the gorge of the cañon. There, topping a rock on the far side of the gully a scant two hundred yards he saw a man hurriedly throw himself behind a stump. He recognized him instantly.

It was Sydnor.

"Well—what do you make of it?"

Mr. Boyce with the two women close behind him pressed close to Tom. Tom's eyes were still glued on the man across the gorge.

He saw a blue rifle-barrel drop into line with him. Instantly his long arm swept Mr. Boyce off his feet and behind the ore-dump. At the same time he shoved Helen and Cynthia behind the angle of the cutting.

As they dodged under cover a rifle-crack broke the afternoon hush and a bullet smacked against the rock-face.

WHEN he was sure that the girls were safe in the tunnel Tom threw himself prone upon the floor and worked his way on his stomach toward the opening.

The ore-vein that Jewett had followed dipped toward the hill, and the floor was highest on the surface of the hill. When he got within five feet of the entrance Tom took off his hat, laid it on the ground and pushed it before him with his rifle.

A rifle cracked and a bullet ripped through the tall crown of the hat. It jumped a foot in the air.

"Close shootin'. Now they'll think the hat's empty."

He carefully pulled the hat toward him, thrust his head under it and raised his head, looking out across the valley.

Two hundred yards away on the opposite slope he saw Sydnor still squatting behind the stump on which his rifle was lying. Behind him were grouped Jenson and ——

For a moment Tom could not believe his eyes. So that was how Sydnor had come here! Darke and Wettin were in this matter! He knew that they must have come in an automobile as he had come, for no ponies could have made the pace.

With Darke and Wettin on the job the game would now be played to a showdown. Well, he could ask no better luck.

Only—he wished the girls were out of this mess and were in safety. They were safe enough just now, but cooped up in that tunnel with neither food nor water and with four desperate men outside— He thought hard for a moment, his eyes prickling in the heat as he very slowly edged forward.

He could not get a fair shot at Sydnor. He did not want merely to wound him.

With Darke and Wettin he had no killing quarrel; but the other—Jenson—that shambling, unkempt figure that exuded immorality as a civet cat exudes his smell——

Darke and Wettin meant danger to him and to Peter Boyce only. They were men and could look after themselves. Jenson and Sydnor must be got out of the way for the girls' sake. He could not shoot with certainty at Sydnor but he could at Jenson.

Slowly Tom's rifle-sights dropped into line with the man's beard. Just as he was about to press the trigger a sudden thought came to him.

Why kill when he could maim? That was better from every point of view.

He changed his point of aim and sighted at the brown leg just above the knee.

He fired.

Instantly came a long crack. Then, long before the startled yell came to him, Tom saw Jenson fold suddenly up as he instinctively shrank on the wounded leg. Jenson collapsed with a grunt. Then he saw the jetting blood squirting out from between his fingers and he screamed shrilly.

Sydnor dived for cover at the shot. The two partners hastily dragged Jenson behind a huge boulder where they bandaged him with handkerchiefs of more than doubtful cleanness.

"There! You're fixed," Darke grunted.

Jenson glared at him, his yellow tusks showing like the teeth of a frightened wolf.

"Yes—I'm fixed now for fair. Just you wait! Them men over yonder will pay! The hand of the Lord will strike them but

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they'll think it was me. What're you goin' to do now?"

"Starve 'em out, I suppose. How about it, Sydnor?"

"Yes," he growled viciously. "They've got no grub nor water. It's only a question of hours. One rifle can cover the entrance to that tunnel so they can't get out."

"How about when night comes?"

"We'll build a big fire in the bottom of the cañon so the flame will light up the whole bank. In twelve hours we'll have all there is in that tunnel. And Jenson here'll have what he wants. I'll have my share too," he added grimly. "And that's a good deal more than we agreed on back in Palo Verde."

"What do you mean?" growled Darke.

He was annoyed and puzzled at the man's tone.

"I mean the big girl over yonder. She's mine. I found her first. Jenson's got the first claim on the girl who used to work in your office—Helen Keene. The other's mine—mine, I tell you!"

Darke turned away. He was not at all interested in Helen Keene, and of Cynthia Hazen he had never even heard. Anyway to have them carried off would be the best solution of a troublesome problem.

Those two girls must disappear. There was no question about that. When he and Wettin had got what they had come so far to obtain there must be no witnesses who could appear later to tell all they knew.

Jenson's plan to carry them to Mexico would solve the problem.

From the prison of a Mormon house in Mexico they would never talk.

XV

DURING that long, hot Arizona day Tom lay behind his little barricade looking for some sign of life on the far hillside. With armed men just across from them any attempt to escape from the prospect hole would be sheer suicide.

Slowly the run rose, found the zenith, hung there for a space and dropped slowly down the western arc.

"They'll try some devilment after dark," growled Mr. Boyce when Tom whispered his fears. "From what you tell me Jenson an' Sydnor want the girls. Then they won't do no indiscriminate shootin' into the cut for fear of shootin' them. They're more likely to smoke us out. There goes the last of the sun."

Darkness shut down on them like a folded blanket. The great golden stars suddenly burst into shining points in the blue-black arch above them.

A crackle overhead made Tom turn and look hurriedly over his shoulder. Then a stone fell from the lip of the cut into his upturned face. Before he could speak a bundle of dry brush crashed through the scrub on the hillside and rolled into the cut. In its very center was a flicker of flame. He promptly stamped out the fire, breathing hard.

"Keep back," whispered the old man. "Some one's on the hillside above the cut, where we can't see to shoot. He'll keep pilin' the stuff up till some of it flames up. That'll give 'em light to see so they can pick you an' me off."

"But—" Tom turned sharply on him—"if we go back in the cut we'll be stifled till we come out and surrender."

"That's so. Wait a bit. Our heads wasn't give to us just to scratch. I've got it."

"What?"

"Roll one o' them bundles of brush to the end of the cut."

Tom did so just as a huge pile of brush that Wettin and Darke had collected in the bottom of the gorge caught fire. The flame licked east, then west, in the rising wind.

Then it steadied and shot straight up into the sky in a leaping tongue of fire. Both slopes were as plainly visible as by daylight. A rat could not now have left that cut unseen. The cut itself was as dark as a wolf's throat.

Tom rolled the bundle of brush over the edge. It crashed down twelve feet of slope and stopped in a small bush.

"Put a rock in the next one."

He did so, tying the brush in a long bundle with strips from an old ore-sack. There were a dozen old bags in the hole.

"Come back under cover," said Mr. Boyce.

Wonderingly Tom followed him behind the shoulder of rock where the girls crouched. Helen had him instantly by the arm.

"Oh! Are you hurt? Are you hurt?" she demanded.

"Oh, no. I'm all right."

"Are you sure?"

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Her insistence was "cakes and ale" to him. Tom looked fondly at her. Even in the dusk of that tunnel he could see the pure, pale contour of her face as she pressed closer to him. A long, child-like wail from the ridge above them made their blood run cold.

"Lion," commented Mr. Boyce. "He tried to make a kill an' failed an' he's belly-achin' about it. Tellin' all the world. Kin you roll down that hill?" he demanded, turning suddenly on Tom. "Somebody's got to do it—you or me; an' you're younger. Kin you roll down that hill, I ask you, if I tie you an' your rifle up in a parcel o' brush?"

"Good Lord, yes. The trouble'll be, can I stop."

"It's this way."

Mr. Boyce laid a finger on Tom's arm.

"One of us—you er me—has got to git out o' here with a rifle. It's a big risk but it's a sure failure to stay here.

"Patricio ought to git here with the burros in a few hours. Two men outside an' one inside'll put the kibosh on them fellers."

"He shall not," said Helen suddenly as the plan dawned upon her. "Why, he'll be killed!"

"We'll all be killed if he don't," said Mr. Boyce grimly.

Tom made no answer in words. He tightened his belt, refilled his rifle and thrust it down inside his trouser-leg so it would not be broken. Then he limped slowly back to the mouth of the cut, into which every now and then a bundle of dry brush fell with a crash like thunder.

Mr. Boyce drew a bundle of it to him.

"H'm! Greasewood an' sage-brush. They know what'll smoke us out. Come on, son, I'll dress you up fer your trip."

"For Heaven's sake put a big bunch of sage-brush over my head and feet."

"Nothin'll dent your head. But your feet's the biggest things I ever seen that didn't have a liver in 'em."

In ten minutes' hard work he had transformed Tom into a seven-foot fagot of rough brushwood and sage-brush and had placed the bundle on the edge of the slope on the hillside.

"Just one word—" he bent over Tom—"I'm goin' to throw another bunch over before I roll you down-hill—then you'll go. It'll hurt like ——! It'll probably knock you out, but you ought to git clear away. As soon as you do git clear—go to shootin'."

A MOMENT later Tom vaguely heard a muffled crash as Mr. Boyce rolled the other fagot down-hill. A silence followed; then he felt himself turn slowly over and over.

Tom could hear Mr. Boyce panting and swearing as he toiled. He felt himself hang poised for a second. Then came a sickening sensation and a bump.

A second jar brought stars before his eyes. Then came a quick succession of bumps and slips and twists and turns till his brain sickened in a deadly vertigo.

With his eyes tight-closed he seemed to see quite clearly. Inside his head a great sheet of orange flame shot with black dashes unrolled like a scroll. It rolled up with a sudden snap, and——

All was quiet.

What had happened? Where was he?

Very slowly consciousness came to him. His mouth was filled with dust and his tight-closed eyes burned like fire.

When he breathed it was as if knives were being thrust into him and he felt sure that every bone in his body had been broken.

Where was he? That was the question. If he had stopped rolling while still in the glare of the fire he would be a clear target for Sydnor's men and all their plans would have failed. He could waste no time now. He must take a chance.

He squirmed and twisted, moving his hands till he found an end of one of the straps that held the bundle together. Mr. Boyce had tied it cunningly with the squaw's hitch that pulls loose at a touch.

Tom pulled. It gave instantly, and his hand found free air. In ten minutes he was loose and lay on his back in his nest of brush, gazing at the stars above him through a tangle of the brush into which he had crashed on his roll down-hill.

Seen from above, that slope had looked as even as an inclined plane. As a matter of fact there were three depressions, slight enough but sufficiently deep to hide a man lying down.

Also he had not rolled in a straight line on his way down-hill. He had not counted on this. But a man turns on the arc of his shoulders, and his feet are toward the center of his circle.

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As a result Tom was thirty feet off the line that he and Mr. Boyce had calculated upon. The roll had sent him into the center of a prickly mesquite-bush well down on the hillside.

He freed himself very carefully and worked his rifle from its hiding-place, where it had nearly broken his leg, turned over on his side and looked about him.

The great fire at the bottom of the cañon illuminated the whole valley. The only shaded spaces were a few spots like his hiding-place where heavy, stunted undergrowth curtained the firelight.

He looked up at the cut. It was still dark. Clearly Sydnor had not yet got a fire in the tunnel.

At all costs he must keep the conspirators from setting fire to the brush that they had by now heaped in that prospect-hole. His best vantage-point would be a place in the creek-bed below the fire, for light shines up, not down.

From that place he could see all that took place above him. He would have preferred a place on the hillside opposite the tunnel, but he felt certain that Sydnor had not come alone, though he had not yet located Sydnor's companions.

Backing slowly out of the brush on his stomach, he crept along the narrow belt of shadow till he reached a swale that gave him cover to the bottom of the hill. Down this he crept like a snake till he found cover behind a V-shaped rock that stood under a high bank.

The hillside above the cut was as black as Erebus. He thought rapidly over a new problem that presented itself.

The man above the cut, trying to set fire to the brush that he had thrown into it, would be visible only by the light that he carried. He—Tom—could not see his gun-sights.

He took out his watch and with his knife pried loose one of the radium-lighted I's of the four-o'clock figure. Using a little soft clay from the creek-bank, he stuck it to the back of the fore-sight after rubbing it along the edge of the rear-sight.

He grunted over the result. It was not satisfactory, but it was the best he could do.

Suddenly a spot of light moved in the blackness on the hillside above the cut. Some one was about to try to fire the pile of brush in the tunnel.

Old Peter Boyce had done his best to throw it out as fast as it was thrown in, but he had had to keep under cover from the two rifles across the gully and his work was slow. Two bundles were thrown in for one that he threw out.

If fire ever reached that bush Boyce and the two girls would have to come out and surrender. He must keep that fire from the brush-pile.

The light moved forward slowly.

He shoved his rifle-muzzle forward and strained his eyes in the night. The radium figure on the front sight stood up like the Washington Monument, but he could not see the rear-sight.

"A man carries a light in his right-hand—all right! Aim high and to my right. There you are——"

His finger was about to press the trigger when suddenly there came a loud, raucous sound that tore the night. It made Tom Hardin jump so that his bullet went wide.

It was the unmistakable bray of a burro.

Patricio had come.

Instantly the light on the hillside went out. The shot and the bray had told the story to Sydnor. He knew well enough that the bray meant that aid had arrived for Hardin's party.

He knew that all of the Hardin party was in the cut so they were safe enough. The bray meant that the Mexican packer had come with the burros; but what did the shot mean?

That bullet had missed him by a scant four inches. It sent his heart into his throat. He had been fool enough to leave Darke and Wettin with the wounded Jenson on the hill.

Darke and Wettin! The two partners whom he had held up almost by force for a share in the profits of this trip. He might have known they would double-cross him! He would have done it himself.

Either Darke or Wettin had fired that shot. He knew it as well as if he had seen them do it.

He ground his teeth in anger at his own folly. If he should show another light they would shoot again. If he should try to creep in on them in the darkness they would hear him; and they were three to one. He could do nothing till daylight.

He found a sheltered hole near a great rock and crouched there till early dawn. He could take no chances if Darke and Wettin had double-crossed him.

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THAT ass's bray set Tom afire. He knew now that Patricio had come. He must find him at once before Sydnor or his men should stumble on him in the dusk. As for Sydnor's trying again to set fire to the brush, he figured he'd have to take a chance on that. At any rate, that warning shot would make Sydnor extra slow and cautious.

Backing away from his cover, he moved swiftly among the rocks, heading for the spring where the automobile had stopped. He knew that the burros would have headed straight for water and that the bray heralded their arrival.

He came upon them in a sheltered gulch within five hundred yards. In the gray light of the early dawn the burros bulked as big as elephants. Patricio, almost invisible, was bending over a tiny fire concealed in a recess when he heard:

"Patricio! Hst!"

"*Señor.*"

The man never even raised himself, but his eyes moved to and fro trying to locate Tom.

"Come over here. Come quickly."

In a second Patricio was with him. Tom told him what had happened. Patricio's eyes lit.

"What now then, *señor?*" he demanded.

"Come quickly. Bring your rifle. We will go up on the hillside across from the prospect-hole. They've got a man or two on this side of the cañon, watching the prospect where Mr. Boyce has the two ladies. We've got to get above them on the hill."

Moving farther down-stream, Tom cut off to his left and headed up the hill. His own movements, taught by years of desert wanderings, were noiseless; but Patricio moved like a shadow on a wall.

While the light was still gray in the cañon, long before the yellow fog of the desert had lifted clear of the earth, they were a hundred feet higher up than the place where Darke and Wettin lay with the wounded Jenson, and a hundred yards back of them.

"There's the prospect-hole where Mr. Boyce is."

Tom pointed to the red cut that showed dimly on the opposite hillside.

"There's a man above the place. By Jove, it's Sydnor! He's waitin' for a chance to set fire to the brush in the tunnel. See him? Wait!"

Crouching low in the cover, they saw the white-hatted Sydnor squatting under a bush across the gorge three hundred yards away. It was still too dark to see just what he was doing. Below them, but sheltered from their gaze as they lay, Darke and Wettin sat by the wounded Mormon.

"What're you doin', Patricio? By Heaven, the man is tryin' to fling a torch in the brush-heap in the tunnel. Fire, man!"

Patricio's rifle cracked. The bullet missed Sydnor. He sprang to his feet and shook his fist at his partners across the valley.

He knew now that they had double-crossed him!

Suddenly something else happened. A gray hat rose into view a hundred yards below them as Wettin, hearing the shot behind him, raised himself to see what it meant.

Sydnor dropped his torch, seized his rifle, took a hasty aim and fired.

Tom saw the gray-hatted man stagger back, fling wide his arms and drop. One shout came from the group below him and then silence fell.

Tom almost yelled with the sheer delight of it.

"By Heavens! He did it himself! Shot his own partner! Don't you see, Patricio?"

"*Sí, señor.* But—saints and angels! Yonder go our burros with all our equipment!"

Tom looked. He saw the burros, looking no bigger than mice, moving along the edge of the rim rock of the cañon directly above Sydnor, who stood staring from under the edge of his hand at the wounded man lying prone on the hillside.

"Let 'em go. We'll get 'em later."

"I can head them back now, *señor.* A bullet dropped ahead of them will turn them."

Patricio aimed carefully and fired. The bullet struck the rocky lip of the rim rock under the nose of the leading burro. He started back, pawed violently, caromed into the burro behind him and in a moment five fighting, frightened burros were milling around on the edge of the cliff directly above Sydnor's head.

Tom saw Sydnor turn in astonishment. What could that turmoil mean above him?

He leaned forward and stood high to look. Even as he looked, a great yellow rock,

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kicked from its nest on the rocky edge of the sheer cliff where the fighting donkeys had dislodged it, crashed its way down the steep cliff-face.

It rolled and plunged among the brush and gathering way leaped clear of the rocks.

Suddenly they saw a blur; then there came a slurring crash and—Sydnor collapsed under half a ton of solid rock.

Tom sprang to his feet in his excitement. He watched Sydnor intently for a moment but the latter never moved from where he fell. That rock had done the work as well as any bullet could have done.

"There couldn't have been but four men when they started. Jenson's out of business. Sydnor shot another of his own men. Yonder is Sydnor laid out by a jackass. I'll take a chance. Come on, Patricio! Let's see what's left."

No longer intent on quiet, they moved down the hill till they got a clear view at fifty yards of Jenson lying pale and nerveless by a rock. Beside him sat Obed Darke, his face beaded with sweat that stuck his lank, black hair to his dirty forehead. His lips were working spasmodically like the lips of a man chewing.

"Scared," commented Tom. "Hands up!" he called suddenly as Darke, hearing him scuffle among the stones, turned to face him.

Darke's hands shot high in air as Tom's rifle covered him. He spoke no word.

"Pile up all of your rifles in front of me—quick!"

It was done almost before he had finished the order.

"Pete—Oh, Peter Boyce! You can come out now," Tom hailed.

In answer, Mr. Boyce thrust his gray head out of the drift and looked about him. He gave a quick wave of his hand and presently Tom saw him helping Helen and Cynthia over the ore-dump.

"Go up the hill and look to that man Sydnor. He's lyin' fifty yards above the cut."

Mr. Boyce waved his hand again and plunged up the slope. Long before the two girls had reached the bottom of the gulch Tom saw Mr. Boyce bend over the prone figure; then he rose, dropped Sydnor's white hat over the face and came quickly down the hill.

"Dead?" asked Tom as the old man came up to him.

"Couldn't be deader if I'd done it myself. Who done it?"

"One of the burros kicked a rock loose and it started a landslide on him."

"That's good. Who've we got here? A prize bunch, eh? Darke? What's ailin' you, Darke?"

Darke was frankly sobbing. His overstrained nerves had given way.

"Sydnor shot Wettin—my partner, you know. He's dyin' over there."

Darke nodded to where Jenson had crawled to the wounded Wettin.

Mr. Boyce went over to them, Tom following him. Jenson, his face set with pain, squatted by Wettin, pressing his fingers to a wounded artery. Every now and then a sudden spurt of blood jetted from between his fingers.

Wettin's face was pale and his lips had already begun to take on the fatal bluish tinge.

"It's no use," he whispered. "I'm done for; it's an artery. I've got some papers. Put your hand in my pocket, Boyce. What did you find in the shaft? Quick, man! For God's sake, tell me!"

XVI

TOM looked regretfully at Wettin. He would much rather it had been Darke.

"I'm sorry you got it, Wettin," he said.

"So'm I. Never mind that now; it's too late to mend it. Tell me; what about Jewett's claim? What did you find? Quick, man! Tell me. Don't you see I'm dyin'? Answer me—what did you find?"

Tom looked at him for a moment. He forgot that this man was one of those concerned in trying to rob Helen and himself.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out the bag of red gravel just as Helen came up to him. She was carrying in her hand the rusty pick-head with the point of gold. Tom took it and held them both out to him.

"That's all we found," he said slowly.

Wettin roused himself and pointed to the pick. His eyes grew big with curiosity.

"What is that? Where— How——"

"Jewett had found a good rich pocket. He left a note sayin' that he had put the contents of the pocket in an old can.

"We found the can. It only contained this sack of gravel.

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"Then we looked into the pocket. It was empty except for this pick. The point of it is gold. We found it standing in the empty pocket.

"There were a lot of little veins of gold ore running out from the pocket like spokes of a wheel run from the hub——"

"Jewett found the Mother Lode," blurted out Mr. Boyce. "He told Hardin he had found it and he had. You know that, Hardin."

"Yes—yes."

Wettin was all excitement now.

"He had found it. Don't you know what that earth is?"

"I can guess," said Tom cautiously. "But I don't believe it. It's ridiculous—absurd!"

"It is the truth of the sages—the ages—the wisdom of ten thousand years."

Tom stared at Wettin, whose eyes were gleaming with the fire of an enthusiast.

"See how the point of the pick turned to gold? No man ever was fool enough to weld a golden point to an iron pick. It grew!

"That pick was left there in the pocket when old Jewett stripped it—it was left there after he took out the earth. There was enough of the old force left there to change a little of the iron to gold. It is Primordial Fermentation!"

Tom gasped. Then he suddenly fished the sack from his pocket and poured the contents into his hand. He picked the two rusty nails from the gravel.

"Why didn't these two nails turn to gold?" he demanded.

"Wait—I have it."

Wettin almost sat up in his excitement.

"I have it! That earth—Adam's Earth—retained its full force only when it was working in its own bed. That earth was made before sin existed. It is older than man. Contact with man destroys its properties. There are supposed to be a few small pockets left in places where man has never yet penetrated. When Jewett opened up that pocket he got a little. But it lost all its force—its qualities—its power.

"The old theory of Adamic Earth is proven true. That earth is Adamic Earth. Earth as it was when God first made the earth in six days—before man was.

"Plato called it '*materia prima.*' It has power by fermentation to change all baser metals to gold. Al Geber wrote of it in his Book of Wisdom. Van Helmont said he had seen it—had handled it. Paracelsus and Plato and Isaac Hollandus said so too——"

Exhausted, he fell back.

"Don't you see?" he asked.

Mr. Boyce, his face pale, turned on Tom viciously.

"You've been prospectin' fer years, Hardin. So've I. We've both heard tell of the earth that ferments an' makes gold; heard of it an' set it down as just one more prospector's lie.

"Nobody but a —— fool would believe it. Let's look at it again."

Again, under the glistening eyes of the dying Wettin, Tom sifted the red sand through his shaking fingers. When the last few grains had filtered back into the bag two rusty little nails lay in the palm of his hand. Wettin lay back with a tired sigh.

"I have written—it all down. I searched for the knowledge for forty years—from Pekin to—Rheims. The Arabians had it—then it crossed the seas to Spain.

"Forty years of research and—now—something has happened. Those nails should have been changed to gold.

"The Adamic Earth has lost its power—that's what it is. I am right! It's gone beyond the power of man to restore—but the truth lives even though I——"

"LOOK out, Jenson—mind what you're about!"

The words came in a hurried shout from Mr. Boyce. Jenson, turning a little, had thrown his weight upon his wounded leg. It gave under him. He shrank with the pain of it and sank back with a groan. His grip on Wettin's wound relaxed and a sudden spurt of red arterial blood deluged him.

"He's— Gosh, man! He's gone——"

For Wettin, with a little sigh as of one utterly exhausted, sank back like one asleep.

They laid him at length among the little bushes and with one accord pushed their way out of the tangled scrub into the broad daylight. All about them the sunlight fairly dripped gold through the branches of the live-oaks. The grass and gravel and the lichened rocks all seemed tinged with the golden hue that must have shone along the banks of Pactolus where all was gold after Midas bathed in it.

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Why not? They had seen the place where gold grew; they were in the very home and center of all gold, where it was made by that unknown force in which man had never yet entirely lost belief. Illusions die hard.

A fable? Tom asked himself the question. Was he living a fable?

The world seemed very unreal to him; the only real thing was—Helen; and he was the only one of all the party who retained a grip on the verities of life. He stood in a daze.

It could not be true. Of course not! It was perfectly absurd. A chimera if ever there had been a chimera. Yet—man had taught that fable for two thousand years and—there was the pick with the golden point.

There were the twisted lines of the gold veins that ran from the empty pocket that old Ben Jewett had stripped; from which he had taken, if Wettin was right, that little handful of Adam's Earth; the raw primordial stuff from which God had made the earth in six days before sin was.

He had that same earth right now in his possession but—it had lost its power. And they had nothing left but the two bullion bricks that might be worth seven thousand dollars each!

How could he explain it all to Helen? She had seen and heard but a part and would not understand.

HELEN stood with Cynthia a little to one side, her face pale, her lips trembling and her beautiful eyes filled with tears. Tom turned toward her. Mr. Boyce stopped him with a gesture.

"I'm tellin' Patricio to pack Jenson in the car he came in. Darke can take him out. We don't want to be tied up with any arrests with these people. Least said soonest mended. If they die—so much the better. What do you say?"

Tom nodded. He was glad to get rid of Darke and Jenson at any cost.

Patricio saw that the car was in running order and helped Jenson into it. Darke followed him and presently they heard the machine working its way noisily down the gorge.

They never saw it again.

Tom turned to Helen. She looked up as he drew near and colored warmly under his eyes. For a moment he said no word but let his eyes speak for him. They told her volumes.

"Come with me for a few minutes," he said. "I have something to tell you."

"Tom—oh, Tom!" Mr. Boyce interrupted him. "Look after everything in the camp, will you? I'm goin' to round up them burros. They'll git away with all our stuff if I don't."

Tom nodded as the old man strolled away.

"Come," he said again. "Come. I want to talk for once in my life with only you to hear."

They went down to the little salt spring, she wondering what he could have to say that made him suddenly so solemn.

"I've got a great disappointment for you," he said curtly.

"What do you mean?"

Very slowly as one explains a lesson to a child he told her all; told her of the legend of the Mother Lode, of Adamic Earth and the Philosopher's Stone; how Jewett said that he had found it and finally how they had hopelessly lost it.

"We've got no more than those two little bricks of bullion that Jewett left us," he concluded lamely. "We will have had our quest for nothing——"

"For nothing?"

Helen looked at him.

Tom paused. How could he tell her all now? How could he tell her that he loved her when, aside from his bullion brick he had no more property than his hat could cover? Ben Jewett had meant well by him—if only Ben's plans had not miscarried.

"For nothing! Two bullion bricks worth, it may be, fourteen thousand dollars; a gold-pointed pick; a handful of Adamic Earth that has lost its power——

"Poor Jewett," Tom sighed. "His mind was wandering in his last hours. This would have driven him stark crazy. A prospector always fools himself, you know. Here ends the story of Adam's Earth and the Mother Lode!"

"They both exist—we know that," Helen said quickly.

"Yes—but only for us. No one will ever believe it if we should tell them."

"Who ever believes the really wonderful things in life until they meet them face to face?"

They sat in silence looking out over the vast expanse of virgin land untouched by

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man; at the long slopes of brown earth spiked with the unsightly stalks of the *sahuaripa*, the yellow-tufted *choya* and the olive-green paddles of the prickly pear. They watched the moving cloud-shadows swing eastward, blanketing the warm earth with a gray shroud.

There came a break in the clouds and the sun, dropping behind the saw-toothed mountains of the great range, touched hill and valley and desert land with a flood of golden light. Dome-like mountains shot suddenly up in the crystal air. Long level rays, portending rain that would never fall, stretched from the sun to the horizon.

"There's rain somewhere," said Helen, her chin cupped in her hand.

"Jacob's Ladder—gold—all gold."

Tom turned and looked at her.

Quicker than light he envisioned her. Tall, clear-eyed, clear-visioned, she stood; the woman of women for him——

Still she sat and gazed westward. The light of the West was in her face—the light of great hopes dimly seen; of a limitless future; of broad lands; of wide spaces; of freedom——

His hand dropped suddenly on hers. She felt it, warm and trembling a little in its strength. She dropped her eyes and saw that lean brown hand enclosing hers. Still she said no word.

"Can you ever care for me, Helen?" he asked.

There was an odd catch in his voice.

"I am poor—I've got nothing—but I love you. Can you care?"

Still she said nothing. Emboldened, he passed his arm about her. She came unresistingly and leaned against him, her cheek against his.

The silence of the desert enveloped them as with a garment, and the last warm breath of the departing sun drove upon them in a gentle draft of the genial west wind. It seemed a portent of excellent things to be.

"I suppose we ought to go back to Cynthia," she said presently. "Can you say now that you have nothing?" she said quizzically.

He grinned at her engagingly.

"I won't say it till after we are married."

Then he became serious again.

"I know now all about Adam's Earth," he said; "and what it is that turns all base things into pure gold. I know the theory of primordial fermentation and I know what it is that is needed—the one thing that is needed in this world to turn it all into a Garden of Eden."

"You do?"

She looked her question.

Tom Hardin made no answer in words. He rose to his feet and drew her to her full stature. Then she found herself clinging to him, trembling, her arms about him, her flushed cheek against his.

"Do you know now?" he asked gently.

Suddenly the raucous voice of Mr. Boyce interrupted them. Unconsciously he voiced the opinions of a scoffing world as he hunted up the loose burros that had strayed from camp.

"I wonder where them two —— asses is," he demanded querulously. "Give 'em an inch of rope an' they think they own the earth."

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The Buccaneer's Last Shot

(Storming of Fort San Lorenzo, at the mouth of the Chagres River, January, 1671)

By Farnham Bishop

BACK fell the beaten buccaneers,
Back to the foot of the blood-stained hill.
Loud rang the Spanish garrison's cheers,
But a buccaneer was hard to kill!

A bow-string twanged on the castle wall;
In a pirate's breast the shaft sank home;
Prone on his face fell the rover tall,
Spitting curses and bloody foam.

He seized the arrow and plucked it out,
With never a wince at the fearful pain.
He wrapped the shaft in a cotton clout,
A vengeful thought in his dying brain.

Into his musket he rammed it tight,
And shot it back with a hunter's aim.
Lit by the flash and fanned by the flight,
The arrow flew in an arc of flame.

A thatch-roofed barrack, a well-hit mark,
A magazine with an open door;
A crackling blaze and a flying spark,
A blinding flash and a rending roar!

With no more strength than a little child,
(The blood flowed fast and the end was near)
Patting his musket, he grimly smiled
And died the death of a buccaneer!

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Blackmail

By Gordon Young

Author of "Murder," "Born to Be Hanged, But—" etc.

AS USUAL when a woman gets into trouble Mrs. Vera Venables expected some man to help her out.

I did not know Mrs. Venables. I did not want to know her. I did not even care to know that she was young and pretty.

Dick Venables was a friend of mine, but he had always shown poor judgment in women. Men usually do when they believe a woman is as desirable as she looks.

I had never met his wife. I do not care to meet wives.

But Mrs. Venables called upon me with pearls in her ears and tears in her eyes. She was furred and frocked and, I said to myself, had done her best to look dainty and helpless.

"I love Richard more than anything else in the world," she said after stammering through a rather surprizing story.

"But why come to me?" I asked again.

I had wedged that question in two or three times previously, but she had ignored it.

"You are his best friend, and I was sure you would help his wife."

She leaned forward sweetly and smiled expectantly. But as I was not gallant enough to spring up and promise all she asked the expectancy rather withered and she drooped back—again tearful.

I was not aware that I was Venables' best friend. If he thought so it was because of his own folly. His folly had got him into trouble and—well, I gave him some advice, loaned him some money—for his father had been a watchful man—and sent my card in to the swindler that had bilked him.

When that swindler had read, "Donald Everhard," he fairly bounced in his eagerness to give Venables back the money got through a phony faro layout. That swindler and I had met before.

One or two other little things turned up, and Venables was as grateful as a lost dog that has been patted on the head. He sang my praises, but I did not care much for the tune.

I am susceptible to flattery, of course. But I scarcely think it flattery to have a young enthusiast proclaim right and left that I am a sort of *Robin Hood*—willing to do any kind of crooked work as long as it helps a deserving friend.

Nothing of the kind. I am perfectly willing to pluck the tail-feathers of vultures—to trim a swindler or trip a crook by tricks of his own trade—but I never stole ten cents from anybody that dared carry his tale to the police. I have had to live by my wits, and that is not the easiest way in the world for a man honest as myself — that is, reasonably honest — to make a living.

Venables was a young fool. But I liked him. He had married a pretty woman;

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and she protested, or affirmed, or whatever it is that women do when convincing strangers that they love their husbands, that she loved him.

Venables was a fellow of touchy honor and high temper. Also he was rich. His father's recent death had left him with money.

My personal opinion was that Miss Vera Whatever-Her-Maiden-Name had looked into the condition of old Venables' health before permitting herself to love Dick.

Anyway she had come to me with a most lamentable tale and asked me to loan her ten thousand dollars. I was Dick's dearest friend, and she was his wife. If she had asked for ten cents car-fare I wouldn't have thought much about it. But I needed money almost as much as she.

One reason I have appeared respectable in spite of all the things people say of me has been due to the so-called quiet elegance of my manner of living. A professional gambler—but I wear no jewelry.

My apartment is always in the most respectable and expensive neighborhood. My clothes are always of dark cloth and made by the tailors that charge the most. I am reputed to be wealthy. So I have many friends.

Mrs. Venables seemed to think that I could loan her ten thousand dollars about as easily as I really could have loaned her care-fare. Anyway she had come confident that I would.

It is impossible to tell anything about women. That is one reason why I try to leave them alone; they are incomprehensible.

Consider Mrs. Venables: She was up against a blackmailer. What was the nature of the documentary evidence offered her in exchange for ten thousand dollars, I do not know.

She offered to tell me "all." But I did not care to listen, first because I would have no way of knowing that she was telling me the truth; and secondly because I did not care to share any intimate secrets with a woman so consciously pretty and so tyrannously helpless as Mrs Venables.

But she came to me, a stranger, a friend of her husband's, asking for money to buy from a blackmailer a secret that she "would die rather than have Dick know." That is feminine logic.

And the maddening thing is that such crazy logic is usually accurate.

"But as Dick's best friend," I said slowly, "it is my duty to tell him."

"Oh, no," she said softly, widening her eyes to a wistful look, smiling with a faint trace of sorrow and half-putting out her hands to me in an effective little gesture of protest. I like to watch these little artifices of women. They do them so well.

"Oh, no; you are a gentleman!"

It seems, as nearly as I can tell from observation, that a man who is also a gentleman is one that always does precisely what some woman wants.

Mrs. Venables had told me that a lawyer, a certain Edward Spence, had come into possession of a certain photograph—a certain kind of photograph, I think she meant—together with, of course, the inevitable indiscreet letters. She said the photograph had been faked and retouched; that is, that a clever artist had taken a real photograph and with deft touches made it appear fearfully indelicate, and then had had other photographs made from it which were seemingly the genuine originals.

Such work can be done. It is done every day. But the letters were genuine. They weren't terrible letters. No. But as a supplement to the photograph they were indefensibly compromising.

I did not want details. I do not care to have any woman degrade herself by a painful confession to me; and on the other hand I don't like to have to go to the trouble of wondering whether or not she has lied.

Mr. Edward Spence wanted ten thousand dollars. He made the usual threats.

"If Dick's half the man I think he is," I said, "he will break Mr. Spence's head and gladly pay the fine for disturbing the peace."

She promptly threw out the danger signals of hysteria. Her hands fluttered nervously, her lower lip quivered and her eyes began darting wildly about the room.

I did not want a hysterical woman in my apartment, my eminently respectable apartment; particularly not when she was the wife of one who claimed me as his "best friend."

"Dick must never know! I'll kill myself! I couldn't stand it! If you won't help me I don't know what I shall do!"

Et cetera.

I gestured protestingly and begged her

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to calm herself. She wouldn't calm herself. She wanted to cry, and she did.

And what is more, I promised to help her. I just had to get rid of her. There was no other way.

She instantly brightened and beamed and sighed—and held out her hand to me. Then she left trippingly; one could tell that she was a happy and contented woman. She had transferred her worries to a man's shoulder.

II

I DON'T know what she would have thought if she had known what I intended.

I intended to be well-paid for my part in the blackmail.

I needed money, and the more I thought of it the more it seemed that Mrs. Venables' visit had been a special fortune.

Some inquiries made in various places brought a wealth of information about Mr. Spence. I have a pretty wide acquaintance among what is called the "underworld," and if I were compiling a list of friends who were friends I am afraid I would have to go to the police records to find out pretty much the early history and achievements of my most loyal and dependable acquaintances.

Mr. Spence was ostensibly a lawyer. He was clever. Also prosperous. Perhaps he was too clever to be cornered.

He seemed to conduct a regular blackmail business, and he did it adroitly. I gathered that he always pretended to be protecting his victims from blackmailers.

His method of working was this: He had told Mrs. Venables that an unnamed party had brought to him the letters and photograph and asked him to settle with her for what he could get.

Mr. Spence declared that he had protested indignantly against being insulted by having such a proposal made to him. The party then said very well, he would take his photograph and letters to some lawyer that knew when he had a good thing.

The party had wanted fifty thousand dollars. Now Mr. Spence thought he saw a chance to do Mrs. Venables a favor. If she wanted this party arrested he, Mr. Spence, would promptly have him arrested.

This was a clever part of Spence's procedure as it gave him an insight into how likely the victim would be to fight.

If she didn't care to have him arrested, and really wished to make a settlement and get the unfortunate documents out of the way, he, Spence, would do his best to arrange for as small a settlement as possible.

Of course, he was not to get a penny of the money. He was merely aiding Mrs. Venables to make the best of a bad situation, and his fee for services would be quite moderate.

That is the sort of story she had told me; but naturally I knew that Spence was a liar, for no honest man—or lawyer—dabbles with blackmailers. I found out that Spence's reputation for doing precisely that sort of thing several times a month was pretty well established by those in a position to know.

Perhaps the police were not. But certain of my friends knew other people who made a business of selling blackmail material to Spence.

I called on him.

He had a beautiful office, one of those large expensive offices, a trifle dim and quiet, with oriental rugs on the floor and severely plain but expensive furniture. It was the most respectable and impressive-looking office imaginable.

On the door in simple style was his name: Edward Spence.

Inside was a neat young woman.

Had I an appointment with Mr. Spence?

I had not.

It would be necessary. I protested that my business was urgent. She was sorry.

It seemed to me that her eyes narrowed a little as if she was not unaccustomed to having people with the claim of urgent business, and knew how to handle them with tact and firmness.

Across the room there was a door marked "Private."

I had stated my wish to see Mr. Spence and she had made her reply. I had nothing more to say.

I did not intend to leave without seeing Mr. Spence and I did not care to argue the matter with an office assistant, particularly with a woman office assistant. For one thing all the women I have ever tried to argue with can say three words to my one.

I simply stepped to one side, walked past her, heard her gasp, shook her hands off as she clutched at my arm, opened the

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door marked "Private," stepped inside and slammed it in her face.

A neat little fat man who had his feet cocked on the table and a novel in his hands, seemed on the point of jumping out of the window. I had closed the door with some firmness. It made considerable noise in that quiet office.

"What d'you want? What d'you want? What d'you want?" he repeated rapidly as he eyed me, and all the while his hand was groping in a half-opened drawer.

All that had taken scarcely five seconds; then came a relieved, "Ah," and Mr. Spence's manner was transformed into one of cool suavity.

Evidently he had got his hand on the gun and felt better.

"Mr. Spence, I believe?"

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Just a minute, please," I said quietly, lifting a chair nearer to his desk and sitting down as I laid my hat and stick on his table.

Then I added:

"I have a little business matter to talk over with you. The young lady out there was under the impression that you were busy.

"Now take that gun out of the drawer and aim it at my head if that will compose you any. You are really too nervous to talk business."

He shut the drawer with a vicious blow and turned intensely red. Mr. Spence was quite bald and I could see the blood mounting even to his scalp.

"Your impudence—your impudence——"

But he evidently could think of nothing more. He was standing and moved his feet restively.

"Yes, yes," I said slowly, nodding an amiable agreement. "It is mine."

Then with businesslike directness—

"Now regarding Mrs. Venables——"

His hand shot out and clutched at the handle of the drawer.

I had no scruples against tormenting that fat little sleek vampire, so with every appearance of seriousness I said—

"Supposing you lay it on the desk where it is handy—and I'll put mine there, too."

With that I drew one of my automatics—and I carry only those of a formidable size—on the desk and let my fingers rest on the handle.

"Oh for ——'s sake put that up—put that up!" he cried. "What're you goin' do? Murder me? Murder me?"

His terror was real.

I tried to assume a mildly surprized expression as I assured him that nothing could have been further from my thoughts; that I had only thought it would be well to let him see how it felt to have some one continually clawing and reaching for a gun—as he had been doing.

He was shaken, but regained his composure, mopped his face and smiled laboriously as he sat down.

I have been told that I have no sense of humor. It is true that I seldom if ever laugh, and rarely smile. However I wanted to laugh at the way he eyed that automatic as I lifted it up to return it to my pocket, but lingeringly fondled it for a moment or two.

"Now regarding Mrs. Venables. I am a friend of hers——"

Instantly he began his protest that he had only been doing her a favor—and all that sort of thing.

"Oh," I said with a mild air of disappointment that jerked him up into a comical attitude of incredulity and expectancy.

"Eh—" he said, and went on suavely—

"Was there some—some particular angle of the matter you wanted to talk over with me?"

"Why, yes. I believe the party—the blackmailer from whom you are trying to save Mrs. Venables— You know? Yes. I believe he first expected—in fact demanded—fifty thousand dollars? And you, having contempt for that miserable, vulturous work and desiring to benefit Mrs. Venables, succeeded in lowering the demand to the modest sum of ten thousand dollars?"

He unctuously rubbed his puffy hands and assumed a modestly virtuous expression.

"Yes, yes," he admitted.

"But I happen to know that Mrs. Venables is—ah—is in a position to, and is willing to, pay fifty thousand dollars."

HIS jaw nearly fell from his face. His puffy blue eyes bulged. Had I put my foot in his stomach I could not have given a greater blow to his nervous system.

At last he collected himself enough to remark—

"But I thought——"

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"That is just it," I interrupted calmly. "I am a friend of hers. That is how I know. She told me."

I have not been a gambler, a professional gambler, since I was a youngster, a mere youth in my 'teens, without learning the art of the expressionless face. I simply looked at him as I would have done had I drawn cards, then bet against his pat hand.

A gradual illumination crept over his features, and he rubbed his hands softly and leaned toward me confidentially as he murmured:

"I see. I see. Ah!"

But he was not yet willing to compromise himself with me. I needed money and I was prepared for such little difficulties as I had anticipated.

"My name is Donald Everhard. I am a professional gambler—or used to be before the police interfered with that profession. Now I pick up an honest dollar wherever I can find it."

"Seems to me I have heard that name," he said doubtfully, struggling with his memory.

"Yes. I have sometimes had the misfortune to be mentioned in the papers. You see, on one or two occasions people have shot at me by mistake—that is, under the impression, you understand, that they could shoot quicker than I."

"I do remember—now," and he mentioned a little affair that had attracted a modicum of attention; but he did not seem as enthusiastic as I had hoped.

"I suggest, Mr. Spence, that you look me up. Make a few inquiries. You will find that I have not and never did have the remotest connection with the police, and that I have lived by my wits.

"You expect ten thousand dollars. Mrs. Venables will gladly pay fifty thousand dollars—that's twenty-five thousand dollars apiece."

He started to protest again that he had no interest, no financial interest, beyond his modest fee, in the matter.

"But she will gladly pay it," I insisted.

He mentioned that she had seemed depressed and hopeless over paying ten thousand dollars.

I smiled condescendingly and assured him that the ways of women were incomprehensible; that she had mentioned to me that she put on the air of distress for his benefit.

"Venables is a millionaire—and generous. It is easy for her to buy a necklace—pay fifty thousand dollars—and produce paste that cost only one thousand dollars. Then what happens? Why, she becomes afraid of losing such precious stones and locks them up in the safety-deposit vault—to remain indefinitely.

"Really, Mr. Spence, I am afraid that you—I mean that the party who is making his demands through you—did not fully appreciate his opportunity."

"But why do you come?" he asked coolly.

He was now the smooth, hard blackmailer, cunning and dangerous. My abrupt entrance and the trifling "gunplay" had for a time brought his essential cowardice to the surface.

"Because I am proposing a way to get fifty thousand dollars instead of ten thousand dollars. I, as the very close friend of Mrs. Venables, will assure her that she must pay the larger demand."

Mr. Spence grunted. Then coolly and impudently—I came near admiring him for his audacity—he explained that he was obliged to me for the tip; but I could not expect twenty-five thousand dollars. Five thousand, he said, was the most.

"You have brains, Everhard, but you've slipped. Now that you've put me wise I don't need your help to go on. Fifty thousand is what she has to come through with—and you take what I give you or nothing. How's that?"

He was almost jocular. Evidently he did have courage of a sort when dealing with fellow blackmailers; and I could imagine how he beat down the dirty vermin that came in with secrets of the rich to sell.

But it seemed that Mr. Spence was not thoroughly acquainted with my reputation. Twenty-five thousand dollars is a lot of money; and I do not believe there are many people who will, even behind my back, accuse me of being timid.

"I am sorry, Mr. Spence," I said with a carefully aggrieved air. "I hoped that we would be able to come to an amicable and profitable agreement. I showed you how to make this deal five times bigger than you planned and——"

"I had been thinking it over," he lied, "and was just about decided to boost the price. I'll give you five thousand dollars. That's like finding it—for you."

I paused, then smiled just a little. It

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was perhaps a little like the smile of a man who has four aces and the joker up his sleeve—for I was not bluffing.

"Spence," I said abruptly, picking my stick and hat from the table and standing up.

I put some feeling into my words, too.

"Spence, I see you are a dirty low-down crook. You can keep me from getting twenty-five thousand dollars, or even a penny, from this deal. But you will pay twenty-five thousand dollars cash—in advance—or you won't get a nickel out of it yourself!"

I said it impressively. I meant it. He was astounded—also frightened.

"No," I asured him contemptuously; "I'm not going to shoot, or beat you up, or anything like that. No. Somebody else may though."

"What do you mean?" he asked slowly.

"I came in here with a fair fifty-fifty proposition. You steal the idea and throw me a sop. From now on I talk to you in terms of cash—in advance—in advance!"

"You're crazy!" he said almost involuntarily.

"Am I? Now pay close attention."

I looked at my watch.

"I am coming in here tomorrow afternoon at this time—three-twenty. And you have twenty-five thousand dollars—in cash—ready for me, or when I leave this office I shall go straight to Richard Venables and tell him the whole story.

"Where will your blackmail scheme be? Your only chance to get a nickel is to keep it from him.

"What is more, Venables has a temper and loves his wife. He may possibly throw his wife over—but he'll get you on the street or in some café. That's the sort of fellow he is. Now what do you say?"

"You wouldn't do it," he said dubiously.

I didn't answer that remark at all. I had said I would, and that settled it as far as I was concerned. I meant it. I would have done it.

Then from Spence—

"But if I give you the money how do I know I'll get fifty thousand dollars out of her?"

He was weakening.

"You don't," I admitted bluntly. "But I have never yet broken a promise—not even to a dirty little blackmailer. And the day after tomorrow—you pay me first—in this room, Mrs. Venables will hand you fifty thousand dollars."

"All right," he said quickly, "then I'll split with you. Just as soon as she pays it over."

"No. Mine has to be cash—in advance. I wouldn't trust you."

"Well, I won't trust you—either."

"Very well," I said, turning toward the door.

"Hey, wait a minute. Wait. We've got to settle this."

"It is a very simple matter with me. If you don't agree to my proposition I shall tell Venables tonight. If you don't live up to it tomorrow I shall tell him then. If you do—Mrs. Venables will come in here day after tomorrow and hand you the money."

I paused. He did not answer. I turned to the door and started out. I was not bluffing, in the least.

"Hey, wait—wait a minute. Wait. I'll do it!"

It cost him an effort, a big effort. He was trembling and red again.

"Thank you," I said. "Three-twenty tomorrow. And cash. Good-by."

And I walked out.

III

I BELIEVE that I am a fortunate man. Again and again, over and over, it has been proved to me that my friends in the underworld are real friends. I have known many of them for years—since I was a taciturn and somewhat quick-triggered youth out in San Francisco.

I have taken pains, in as quiet a way as possible, to impress upon them that I value their friendship. With many of them the friendship was intimate, and they had generously made a good name for me in circles where, according to more conventional opinions, it is disgraceful to have a good name.

If a fellow wanted to go straight I helped him. If he got slammed in stir for failing to go straight, and I knew of it, I helped him.

I did not preach. I did not encourage them one way or the other. I have been censured for my intimacy with them; but I know them, I know their loyalty and generosity and humor—as well as their evil qualities.

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And they are evil at times. Who is not? I could not picture them as "reformed" crooks or as fellows clutched by circumstances. That would be quite wrong.

They were active safe-crackers and pickpockets, "con" men and all manner of things—except sneak-thieves and burglars. Even I draw the line at the coward that, armed and ready to kill, sneaks into a home at night where there are women and children.

There is potential decency in the safe-cracker that takes his chance with watchmen and policemen; in the pickpocket that matches wits against men on the street and detectives; in confidence gamesters that bunco wiseacres.

Not that I sanction or condone that work. I do not. But there is something redeemable, something of inner character, about men that do not sneak.

All of which may be a rather tedious preliminary to the statement that after leaving Spence's office I thought I would rather like to call on a few of my old-time acquaintances—whom I knew to be getting a livelihood behind the backs of policemen. It wasn't often that I went to them—or they came to me for that matter.

IN THE back room of a saloon I met "Eel" McQuire and one or two of his gang. They did not look like typical crooks—not at all—and McQuire was one of the slipperiest fellows that ever spent money from another man's pocket. He was a daring dip and was said to have "eyes in his fingers."

I talked to him about Spence. McQuire knew of him—in fact described him in some detail.

I did not tell of my experience with Spence. It would have involved too much explanation.

But it was a pleasant little meeting and McQuire, red-headed and humorous, declared he hadn't had so much fun since he pinched the watch off of one of the secret-service men detailed to guard the President.

He seemed to get an inordinate amount of amusement out of imagining the expression that appeared on the faces of his victims when they discovered their losses, and he gave several pantomimes for my benefit.

IV

I TELEPHONED and made a dinner appointment for down-town with Richard Venables. He accepted with an eagerness that made me almost regretful that I had, with perhaps a suggestion of rudeness, persistently declined his invitations, some of which were avowedly for the purpose of introducing me to his wife.

I am not sentimental. I refuse to be. If I think something I am about to do is sentimental I wilfully do something else. But I went to an artist friend of mine, a poor fellow in perpetual debt but clever, and he took me to a photographer; and I had a picture taken of myself leaning leisurely against an Ionic column.

After some conversation with the artist and photographer, during which they laughed considerably, largely because I seemed so serious, arrangements were finally concluded for a photographic series that I wished to show to a friend.

So far as I could remember it was the first time I had ever posed for a picture since the wavy-haired days of childhood, when my mother plucked me bodily from my toys and carried me off to a lank man with greasy hair and had my picture taken. But then I explained emphatically to myself that there was no sentiment connected with this photograph which I had arranged for.

Richard Venables was in appearance pretty much of a typical young American, somewhat heavier perhaps than the type, but not hung at all with loose flesh. He had athletic tendencies and a curious, an almost disconcerting, frankness. I had liked him in spite of myself; for as a matter of principle I refuse to like the idle sons of wealthy fathers.

When my wits were fagged or Fortune impudent I have lived—so to speak—on crusts and water. Naturally I have an antipathy for youths born to the purple and swathed in eider-down.

But when Venables had been in trouble I had had something of a personal grievance of long standing against the swindler that nailed him; and afterward Venables was so frankly grateful, so persistently friendly, so unaffectedly conscious of being a—well, a dunce, that I respected him; and of course whenever he got into trouble again he came

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to tell me of it with that kind of trusting hopefulness that more or less obligates the confidant to do something. And I did.

Half-way through the dinner he mentioned his wife for the seventh or eight time. I could no longer evade her without being deliberately rude; and there was something about Venables that made one not want to hurt him; that is to hurt his feelings.

"Oh, yes. Tell me of her," I said with a hypocritical semblance of earnestness.

He did. Frankly, enthusiastically, illusionedly, he was in love with her. Vera was the most wonderful woman in the world.

Before and since, from youths and others all the way to the grayed side of middle age, from all manner of men in all stages of sobriety and lack of it, I have heard of this most wonderful woman in the world. Her name varies: She is now Mary, then Martha, presently Margaret, or maybe Ruth, Rachel or Rhetta, Rose or Renée; and she is always the same, whatever her complexion, weight or height.

"How much do you love her?" I asked bluntly.

One of the penalties in being the "best friend" of any man is that he treats you as a father confessor for love-affairs—whether the affair be with his own wife or some one's else.

"How much?" he replied in a stupefied fashion, precisely as if I had asked him to estimate numerically the grains of sand on a beach.

"Yes. And why?"

"Why?" he repeated, frankly dazed.

"You love her enough to feed her and clothe her as long as she pets you and kisses you and doesn't stare across the room. You love her because she is dear and sweet and won't make you ashamed of having loved her.

"Dick, not one woman in twenty thousand knows what love is. Not one man in a million. That is not a reckless ratio, either.

"Real love is lunacy; it doesn't give a trooper's —— for a woman's past or future, whether she is approved of by friends or an intimate of people one could not tolerate as acquaintances.

"This thing called love, that is solemnized in most marriages, is merely an agreement to live together so long as neither party shocks, disgraces or embarrasses the other. I am not disparaging marriage or crying up love. The conventional arrangement is the most comfortable. But——"

He cut in abruptly.

"Listen. I see what you're driving at. And you are wrong. You've talked to me before about women—and it had a big influence when I met Vera.

"I've told her all about you and what you said, too. She's never met you but she's wanted to, awfully. You don't know how much we talk of you.

"Vera didn't want to marry me. I knew why. She doesn't know that I knew.

"But you once said a man had no more business meddling with a woman's secrets than he had cutting into her breast to watch her heart-beats. It set me thinking, your saying a woman is what she is because of what she has been; and if you love her it is stupidity to complain of whatever in her past has so developed her as to make her the object of love."

I did not remember having ever delivered that more or less favorite lecture of mine to him. I have no use for women. But I have less for men that pry and meddle and jealously snoop around a woman's past, and I am likely to say so and tell why, if somebody touches that particular button in conversation.

So Dick did know that Vera had specters lurking in the years behind her. Blackmail would not be very profitable in Vera's case if she became aware of that. And there must be more to Vera than I thought if she could get and hold the love of a man who knew certain things that the average male takes a pride in never forgiving in a woman.

I began to understand, too, why Vera had come to me with such assurance. She knew of my ideas on women's secrets. She reasoned, of course, that I would be sympathetic. I wasn't—but it amounted to the same thing. I was going to help her out, and incidentally get some money into my own pocket. It is a privilege to help friends or even strangers, when they deserve it and it pays.

I knew that sooner or later Dick would get around to a remark about "doing anything for me." He always came to that at some stage of the conversation. He always said it as if he meant it; but I have an aversion to accepting favors.

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True, I often do accept them, ask for them at times, occasionally demand them. So when, with his customary appearance of sincerity, he said he would do anything for me I was waiting for him.

"Supposing that I asked for the loan of—say—one hundred thousand dollars for forty hours?"

That rather floored him for a second; then he brought his fist down clatteringly on the table and, almost glaring at me, said—

"By ——, you'd get it!"

"A lot of money—cash, you know."

"I have a batch of bonds that I can raise money on—any time."

"Then say fifty thousand dollars for—umm—well, for forty-eight hours."

"How soon?"

"Tomorrow's Friday. Say Saturday morning—not later than ten o'clock. Cash you know."

"You'll get it. And say, I'd like awfully for you to come to the house—dinner you know—and meet Vera. I've been trying to get you ever since we were married—six months now."

"Some time, certainly."

"Some time be hanged. How about Saturday night?"

"Saturday will probably be a busy day for me. I'll let you know later. You won't forget—by ten o'clock. I've something rather pressing in hand."

And so it was that I gulled the husband into paying blackmail to keep from himself secrets that he already knew, or at least suspected—and which did not give him the least concern.

One must be clever and can not be squeamish when the livelihood depends on his wits.

Venables was scarcely out of sight before I telephoned his wife and made an appointment with her. The impropriety of her former visit was repeated.

She came to my apartment. Perhaps she was risking further slander of her name; but whoever takes the trouble to investigate will, I believe, discover that whoever has slanderously linked a woman to my name has later made very thorough apologies to the woman herself.

I will do anything that a man should to avoid trouble; but if anybody plucks at my sleeve and asks for it—why, then my generosity is aroused.

V

ONE of the advantages of living in an eminently respectable apartment is that when a woman drops in, whoever chances to see her is sure to believe that she is only a sister running in for a moment's visit. Respectability certainly has its advantages.

I was surprized that I had not previously noticed that in Mrs. Venables' face there were certain strong lines of character, a certain solidity of personality. And after all she really was not frivolous and fluffy.

The thing called beauty in a woman is always meretricious and deceptive. Look at the pretty faces of women on magazine covers. One glance and they are often fascinating pictures; a minute's scrutiny and they seem empty as a broken wine-glass.

Too, Mrs. Venables apologized with a quaint, half-embarrassed determination to show that she did appreciate her imposition on me, and was deeply thankful that she had—intuitively perhaps, from what little Richard had told her—known that I would understand and help her.

She was rather a different woman; I suppose largely because she believed I would relieve her from worry. Women are always at a disadvantage when worried. And men when they—women—are not.

I remarked that I supposed she was very much in love with her husband. I said it casually, though I looked at her rather intently.

She at once showed signs of agitation. A glint of suspicion passed through her eyes. No doubt she had heard of men who took advantage of their friends' wives. Perhaps she had met them.

Anyway she rather hurriedly veiled her cordiality—that is, her frank cordiality—and tried earnestly to convince me that she did love her husband—oh—I don't know how much.

So having placed her at a disadvantage and definitely on the defensive, I could feel more comfortable.

I said that I had investigated, in fact called on, Mr. Spence.

"He wants fifty thousand dollars—now," I remarked and watched closely to see how she would take it.

She became breathless.

I hastened to assure her—and did not minimize her suspicion of me in doing it,

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either—that I would very easily arrange that little amount for her.

"But how can I ever repay you?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh," I said carelessly—and in a way that caused her suspicions of me to become definite—"that is something you don't need worry about. Money isn't everything in the world. You know, Mrs. Venables, you are a very pretty woman!"

She was on her feet at once with flushed face; tensely she stood, but quiet. No sign of hysteria. No loud protests.

That's the worst of it. One can't tell anything about how a woman will act. At least I can't. So I need to experiment.

"I think," she said quietly, meaningly, honestly, "that I have made a mistake in coming to you. My—my—yes, my life will be ruined—but, sir, one may even have a preference in—in—in calamities!"

Had she made any other kind of an answer I believe that her life would have been, as she called it, "ruined." I would have known that she was not entitled to protection from blackmail.

And after all I did like Dick Venables. And I had lost some of my prejudice against his wife.

And of course, as women usually do when I meddle with their affairs, she had in one dramatic moment turned the tables on me. I was in the uncomfortable position. I should have let well enough alone.

But then one doesn't stare across the green cloth so much as I had done without learning a little something in self-control. Of course I blufied. I looked at her in mild, uncomprehending surprize.

I assured her that I knew she was nervous and overweighted by her trouble, but that there was going to be no calamity that I knew of; that I had made arrangement to pay Spence, or rather to have her pay Spence, the money; that to pay out that money really meant less than she could suppose, for her and Dick's happiness was precious to me—and I had merely reflected on how tragic it would be for a woman of her undeniable beauty to fade and wither because a skeleton was ever rattling behind her.

"You are a very pretty woman," I repeated, unabashed. "But you won't be if this thing isn't settled soon and definitely. So money isn't everything in the world. And why should I expect the wife of my best friend to worry over a loan that means nothing to me and is doing him and her a service?"

I said it sincerely. I said it in such a way that though she was not entirely convinced perhaps she did have an embarrassing doubt as to whether or not she had previously misunderstood.

She sat down again, but she was watchful. Her ears were alert to catch every shade of an intonation. And she was sure to feel deeply ashamed if it did appear by my subsequent manner that she had previously misjudged me.

So to some extent we were both on the defensive; and before she left I could see that she did feel she had blundered in blazing up so indignantly.

"I am distressed—stupidly nervous—and likely to do and say silly things. You will pardon me, won't you, if I have seemed to—to—misunderstand?" she asked as she was leaving, when I had carefully explained all of the details for the payment of the money to Spence.

I assumed a vague paternal understanding, a benevolent, impersonal attitude, and assured her that I did understand—perfectly.

VI

FRIDAY afternoon at three-twenty I called upon Mr. Spence.

He was expecting me. I doubt if he had slept well the night before. He was disturbed and full of suggestions. He wanted to discuss the matter of paying me that money in advance.

I declined to consider the discussion.

In fact I was disagreeable, and when I am disagreeable I say little or nothing. I make no threats and no gestures. I simply stared at Mr. Spence's red, perspiring face.

He had decided not to pay the money. That is, he wanted to make me think he had so decided. I did not know but that he had. Professional blackmailers are cautious, cunning animals.

However, he had a yellow heart inside his fat little body. He had taken the precaution of getting the money and having it there in his office in case he could not make other arrangement with me. He tried to bluff; but he really had not played enough poker to understand the finer points of that art.

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Besides I did have the uncompromising advantage of not greatly caring whether or not he did pay it. It would be worth something to enlighten Venables, particularly as I knew Venables did not care what evidence Spence might have.

Dick was athletic and high-tempered. He would positively enjoy bouncing Spence's fat, rubber-like body up and down on the floor.

Mr. Spence again weakened as I started out of the door. He called me back and handed me twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills.

I am very observing about some things. I always scrutinize the backs of cards when a new deck comes into the game.

In fact I can detect and learn the subtlest markings in a very short time—twenty minutes at most, and playing all the while. My eyes, not without long and severe study, have been trained.

I glanced through the bills—counting them. They were marked.

"Very clever of you, Spence," I said softly—softly; but a flash of fright appeared and remained on his face. "As soon as you got the money from Mrs. Venables you could have me arrested, the money traced, and the markings would convict me. The money would be restored to you."

I gently tossed the bills back on to his desk and looked at him.

He protested almost blubberingly that it was nothing of the kind. I looked at him, shivering and stammering and frightened, and reflected on what fools people in general were to cringe before a blackmailer.

He played on the fact that people were afraid. An instant's lack of fear, a moment of defiance on the part of the victim and he would have revealed himself as a tremulous cur.

He first tried to appear surprized that the bills were marked.

I said nothing.

Then he assured me that he always marked bills of such large denomination.

I said nothing.

Then he explained that he had merely taken that precaution in case Mrs. Venables did not come in or did not bring fifty thousand dollars. He said almost whiningly that he had no other way of making sure that I was not fleecing him—or wouldn't try to fleece him.

He urged me to take the money, assuring me that it would be all right—that if Mrs. Venables came in it would be all right.

"Yes," I said. "I know it will be all right. You sit down there and write as I dictate."

Again he wanted to protest; but again he weakened.

He wrote and signed a statement to the effect that for "services rendered" he had paid me twenty-five thousand dollars in one-thousand-dollar bills, the numbers of which were so and so, and that each bill was privately marked by a dot of red ink in the upper right-hand corner.

I folded the strange receipt in my billbook and said:

"Now, Mr. Spence, you can do whatever you please about trying to make trouble for me over this money. We could have conducted our business amiably enough if you hadn't been such a suspicious and untrustworthy fellow."

I left him with no appearance of anger in my manner. I smiled. I could afford to smile.

VII

SATURDAY morning at ten minutes after eleven punctually, at my suggestion—or rather at my insistence—Mrs. Venables, nervous and veiled, went into the private office of Edward Spence and handed him a package carefully wrapped in strong paper.

Mr. Spence was agreeable but also nervous.

He was surprized at receiving the money. For one thing he wanted to get to the bank so as not to have such a sum on his hands over Sunday; and the money was not presented to him in thousand-dollar bills. Most of them were hundreds, some were five hundreds, but one-dollar bills and many tens and fives were exasperatingly sandwiched in between the more important denominations.

Mrs. Venables had not counted the money. She had not looked at it. I had been at some pains to collect my various denominations, and for two reasons. One of them was the desire to exasperate Mr. Spence and delay him to the point of having to hurry to reach the bank; and the other and more desirable reason was to give the bills an unmistakable bulk.

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He counted the money. He gave Mrs. Venables her letters and a photograph. I had impressed upon her the necessity of taking time to verify every letter, to see that it was her own, and that all of them—the fifteen that had been mentioned in the original demand for blackmail—were there.

As for the photograph—that was less important. It was the photograph of a photograph, so she said; and so far as I knew that was true. In which case another just like it could be produced.

But it was the letters that made the photograph convincing. Without the letters it would have been embarrassing—distressing—but one could have faced the thing with a charge of "fake."

She took her time to do as I instructed; then left, going straight off in her motor.

Spence a minute later rushed for the elevator, his hand clasped tightly against a large lump that showed through his inside coat pocket.

He was in a hurry.

He bounded out of the elevator and started to leave the building.

It happened that as he stepped to the pavement one Charles Thomas Downey, a clerk, a young man of twenty-two, was leisurely returning from his modest lunch at a drug-store soda-fountain. He lived with his mother and contributed to her support; he was quiet and respectable. All of these facts were brought out subsequently in the police court.

Oddly enough at the very moment Spence started from the entrance of the building a man bumped into Downey and instantly began to fume at Downey in a loud voice and presently slapped Downey in the face; whereupon the respectable clerk, being an American, promptly planted his fist in the face of the arrogant young man—neatly dressed and also respectable-looking—who had insulted him.

The street was filled with people. In an instant those about paused, and others hurried up. There was a fight, and people always want to see a fight. There was shuffling and jamming and shoving.

Spence, though in a hurry, paused. For one thing he was not too incurious to give a glance to see what it was all about; and for another he was rather hemmed in by the crowd.

Some one came roughly against him from behind. He was angrily shoved back by the party in front. At once a party at the side seemed to resent Mr. Spence's sudden movements and gave him a hard shove, at which he tripped over the foot of somebody and nearly fell—in fact, he would have fallen had not a slender, well-dressed, red-headed man protectively caught him.

But there was more jostling and shoving, and when Spence had quite regained his balance he thanked the red-headed man, who continued to stand by him, and gave another look toward the center of the crowd, where a policeman had the two peace-breakers in his hands.

Then Mr. Spence, remembering, clutched at his breast, turned pale, scanned the pavement at his feet, looked suspiciously around and nearly fainted.

A block away I was waiting in the lobby of a hotel.

A young man came in and handed me a small parcel and went out.

Eel McQuire, in the shuffle which had been staged for Spence's benefit, had easily removed the package and slipped it to a confederate, who promptly brought it to me. Another confederate had previously picked a fight with Downey—because Downey was the convenient person—as Spence came from the elevator.

Downey and his assailant were later both fined in police court. I paid the fines of both in a rather roundabout way. Downey never knew that he had been one of the principals in staging a scene for the cleverest gang of pickpockets in the country.

So Venables' loan was returned to me, having been out of my hands less than two hours; in fact it had been out of his hands less than two hours.

The reason I had insisted on Spence's paying me in advance was because I could not have profited in any other way.

I needed money; but as I sat there in the lobby meditatively reviewing the whole situation and circumstances I felt dissatisfied. That twenty-five thousand dollars had been made of the blood and sweat of Spence's victims.

True, it was something to have deprived him of it. I am not sentimental. I am not squeamish. I am perhaps a bit cruel at times, and one who makes a living as I have had to make mine must keep his heart calloused.

Too, I was rather hard-pressed for money

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just at that moment—but at that one can usually squeeze through even when pinched. And there is something about blackmail, and money that has passed through the hands of a blackmailer, that is offensive. It had not seemed so offensive in perspective; not nearly so offensive as the idea of shooting a man in the back for the chance of picking his pockets; but between that and participating in the profits of blackmail—I think I could come nearer to restoring my self-respect by evading the blackmail.

Anyway the Soldiers' Tobacco Fund got an astoundingly large, anonymous donation—twenty-four thousand and some dollars; for I deducted what I thought would be enough to pay the police-court fines of Downey and his assailant and make a little present to McQuire. Neither McQuire nor any of his boys would hear of it.

McQuire said:

"Aw, we needed the practise anyway. And besides, though no names were mentioned, I know who the fellow was that wired bail for me to St. Louis last Winter, and also said, 'Beat it!' Besides," he added with a little gesture of repugnance, "Spence is a filthy snake."

BUT to return to that Saturday afternoon.

I telephoned Venables and reminded him that he had invited me to dinner, and that I was coming.

Mrs. Venables and I carried off quite easily the formality of being introduced. She was happy—and more beautiful.

But she came near fainting when I handed to her husband the identical package she had given Spence.

"There's the money I borrowed," I said.

And, ignoring her, I went on to tell that I had been having an experience with a blackmailer.

I knew she was trembling fearfully. I could feel her eyes anxiously staring at me, hoping to catch my glance and beg me with a shake of her head to keep silence.

But I felt like talking a bit. Besides, I had a little something I wanted to explain to Venables—a series of pictures.

"You may not know it," I said, taking out my pictures and undoing the string, "but blackmailers seem to do a rather thriving business through faked photographs. The fellow I have in mind asked fifty thousand dollars—that is why I borrowed it in a hurry. Look here; this is the original."

I extended a picture of myself, genteelly leaning against and encircling a chaste Ionic column with my right arm.

"Here," I explained, "is what an artist did with a copy of the original."

A grinning woman, lightly dressed, had been pasted over the column, and by painting the column out and adding certain touches my arm seemed to have been around her.

"But here," I said, "is the finished product. It would fool any one but an expert—or at least a very close observer."

The third photograph was a photograph of the second, of the fake itself, and had the appearance of having been the original. Such is the way in which the camera can lie. In a similiar but more pardonable way it lies for newspapers every day of the year and enables them to present perfectly proper and highly interesting pictures.

"Now that I have no further use for these—" and I tossed them into the fireplace. "But I thought you might be interested to see how it was done. You may some day have to explain to your wife how you came to be in a picture with an arm around a strange woman. Millionaires, you know, are fair game for blackmail."

He laughed heartily and put his arm about Mrs. Venables. Her eyes, wonderfully expressive, told me of the depths of her gratitude.

She understood why I had taken such pains to bring the photographs; but she did not know that I rather feared Spence, enraged by the loss of seventy-five thousand dollars, would try to extort something more out of another copy of the photograph.

She was also puzzled as to how I regained the money. She was not nearly so puzzled as Venables, who believed that I was not of the temper to pay blackmail to anybody. It obviously pained him to think I, who had done so many things that he called bold, should have even thought of paying blackmail.

"You didn't pay the fellow anything?" he asked anxiously. "I wouldn't give any blackmailer a —— penny!"

"No?" I asked quietly, enigmatically.

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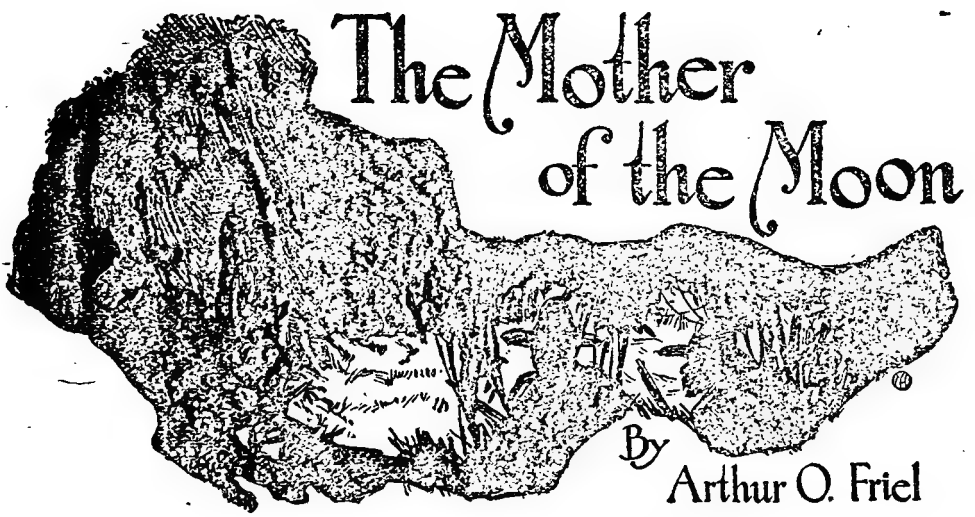
"There are circumstances and other circumstances. The money was paid to this fellow—but he promptly gave it up and I don't think he will care to bother with me again."

At that, dinner was announced; and Mrs. Venables, pushing Dick aside playfully, carried me off on her arm. For a moment her hand slipped against mine and she pressed it gently, but said nothing.

And from that day to this she has called me her best friend. Which is just like a woman; in spite of prejudices and principles, of which I have many, she can make me like her. I am delighted to be really considered her best friend.



Author of "The Jaguar," "The Vampire," etc.

LISTEN, *senhores!*

Listen——

It is a weird, blood-chilling sound, and one that makes the flesh creep. I do not wonder that you two North Americans, though you have braved all the dangers here at the headwaters of the Amazon, sit silent now on steamer's deck as you hear that dreadful cry come out of the jungle; for even I, a rubber-worker old in the way of the Brazilian bush, always grow cold when I hear it.

Yet, *senhores*, that is not the cry of a man dying in agony and despair over yonder in the black swamps. No, it is the call of *a mæ da lua*—the Mother of the Moon.

You have heard it before, you say, and knew not what it was? That is not strange; for there are sounds in the night sometimes which we ourselves can not explain—no, not even the *caboclos*, those tame Indians who have lived all their lives here.

But the cry which came to us just now across the water was only that of an owl. Yes, an owl, *senhores*, which lives in a great hollow tree, and which never speaks except on such a night as this, when the moon is bright and the air is still. Then, and only then, it sits and wails like a lost soul until the moon is wiped out by the clouds or dimmed by the dawn.

It is queer, the effect the moon has on some things. You tell me that even the great ocean is moved by it, tumbling great tides on the shores at times and then drawing them away again. I have not seen that, for the ocean is very far away from here; and my old home, to which I am returning now, is only a little way below Manaos.

But I do know that some things which live and breathe and feel are moved in strange ways by the moon. I myself have sometimes felt an odd restlessness and had wild thoughts at times when the moon was full; and I have known men in whom this feeling was very strong, so that they were not themselves but creatures moved by a "moon-madness." Perhaps it is so with that owl of the hollow tree, which cries out so dismally at such times.

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Listen again. Do you hear it now?

No, it has died out behind us. And I am glad that I do not have to listen longer to it.

But that call coming out of the black bush has aroused a memory, *senhores*, of a time when I heard it under far different conditions and found that it came from a queer throat. So now, while we sit here in safety and smoke, I will tell you a tale of two men afloat in the jungle at flood-time —and of the Mother of the Moon.

AS I SAY, it was the season of the great floods, and all of us men who gathered rubber on the *seringal* of Coronel Nunes had been driven out of the Javary forests until the waters should go down again. And now, driven by restlessness and a craving to see something besides the drowned lowlands, I had taken rifle and machete and, with a mate of mine named Pedro, had paddled westward through the jungle to the hills of Peru.

There we had tramped up into the highlands, found caves full of vampires, and come down again to our canoe. And after sleeping for a night under a little *tambo* which we made with our machetes we arose and asked each other where we should go from this place.

Eastward lay our own flat river-country, and we were not ready to return to it. To go northward would only take us toward the Solimoes—or, as you call it, the Amazon —which was not new to us. Westward rose the highlands from which we had just come.

But southward was hill country of which we knew little. So we felt the call to go southward, and southward we went.

Before we got into the canoe Pedro said:

"Lourenço, I am glad we are to paddle again, for now I can leave off those cursed boots which have been hurting my feet ever since we came ashore."

And he threw the boots into the canoe as if he hoped they would bounce out and be carried off by the flood waters. I grinned at him and put my own boots into the boat too, though more carefully.

Perhaps to you Americans of the North, who wear boots at all times, it may seem a little strange that we preferred to be bare of foot. But you must understand that in our own work in the rubber forests most of us go unshod, taking the risk of snake-bite or other such accidents; and Pedro and I were in the habit of doing this too, so that now our new foot-gear seemed stiff and heavy.

We had brought those thick-soled things with us this time because we knew we were coming into hill country where there were rocks, and already we had found that they saved our feet from many bruises and possible cuts on sharp stones. Now that we were back at the canoe we did not need them, and so as I say we put them away and paddled in comfort.

Neither knowing nor caring where we might go, so long as we kept moving toward some new place, we pushed on for several days up a stream which in the dry season probably was only a creek, but which now was a fairly wide river. Always we had the hills rising at our right, and it was easy to go ashore at night and sleep.

Then we found hills growing on our left too, and the stream became more narrow and swift, though it remained smooth and gave us no hard paddling.

We did not know whether we were now in Peru or in Brazil, for there are hills in our own country too, in that upper Javary region where we now were. It made no difference to us, and we were glad to see those eastern hills because we knew we were getting into the unknown lands and hoped we might meet with something new and strange. And we did.

That night we built our *tambo* on the left bank, and for a time we slept well. Then I awoke. It was very still. No rain was falling, and as I glanced out I saw that bright moonlight was shining into the ravine where we had camped.

It looked very cool and beautiful, that clear light on the trees and vines around us, and as I lay looking out at it I felt strangely light and clear of head—almost as if I had been lifted up out of my heavy body and become free and light as air; a most delightful feeling, *senhores*, and one which I can not explain unless it was because for several days we had seen nothing but rainy sky and black nights, and now the moon made our jungle seem like another world.

And there were none of the harsh noises usually heard in the bush at night—neither the roar of the howling monkey, nor the suffocating sound of the alligator's night call, nor the screams of animals dying in the jaws of other beasts. The only sound I heard was as beautiful as the moonlight—the sweet, sad little song of an *inamboo*,

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that love-bird that seems always calling to a mate hiding shyly away from him in the shadows.

It could not last. Such things can not last long in the Javary jungle.

Suddenly across that love-song broke a desolate, dreary cry that turned me cold. I started up, thinking of a man sinking to death in bottomless mud or caught and crushed by a giant serpent. Again the awful sound came, and again—four times in all. For a minute there was silence. Then came four more cries, weaker but worse than the others, for they seemed more burdened with despair.

And after another silence came two more faint sounds as if the sucking mud were closing over the mouth of the doomed man. Dead stillness followed.

"*Deus meo!*" I heard Pedro whisper, and I looked to find him crossing himself.

We stared at each other without speaking, for our voices seemed to have dried up. And we still sat there thus when the cry broke out again—the same dreadful sound you heard just now, *senhores*, up this river behind us. And this time we realized what it was.

"*A mae da lua*," said Pedro, trying to laugh, though his voice shook. "Only the Mother of the Moon, comrade. It has been so long since I heard it that I did not know it this time. I hope it does not mean bad luck."

I said nothing, but lay down in my hammock and tried to sleep. This I could not do, for the weird cry went on, and the chill that it had put into my bones stayed there.

But after a long time some howling monkeys began making an uproar, and though their noise is not pleasant it was at least something to which we were accustomed, and it nearly drowned out the wails of the owl, so we were glad to hear it.

And at last the moonlight faded out and blackness swept around us, and heavy rain fell. And as the moon died the cries of the Mother of the Moon died also.

I SLEPT again, but I dreamed. In my dream I heard again that blood-chilling cry, and I walked toward it through dark jungle until I reached a great hollow tree.

As I stood looking at this, out from it slid a huge snake, which was very light in color and looked like a living thing made of moonshine. It came straight for my feet, and somehow I could not jump aside because I seemed fastened there. I struck at it with my machete, but did not hurt it at all.

Then it changed from a snake into a long skeleton arm, which took hold of my feet and tried to throw me down; but I fought hard to keep standing up, because somehow I felt that to fall meant death. I kicked hard with one foot at that bony arm, and swiftly it seized that foot in the air and pulled on it as if trying to yank off my boot. But I hopped around on the other foot and yelled to Pedro, who was somewhere back in the shadows.

And Pedro came. I awoke to find him shaking me.

"You are worse than *a mae da lua* and the howling monkeys put together," he scolded. "If you wish to die in your sleep, die quietly, and do not scare me to death also with your screeching."

I lay a minute listening to the drizzle of the rain, and then I told him he would screech too if he saw what I had just seen. And I told him of the dream.

It was so black around us that I could not see him, and I expected him to laugh at me. But he did not. He went back to his hammock, and when he spoke his voice was serious.

"So Death came out of a hollow tree," he said, "and it seized your feet and tried to pull off your boots. And you knew that if you fell you would die.

"Hm! Lourenço, while we are in this hill country we will wear our boots. And if we find a hollow tree we will take care not to fall down."

"Why?" I asked. "Do you believe a dream means anything?"

"Some dreams do," he answered. "And I think this is one of them. I do not know what it may mean, but there may be a snake in a hollow tree somewhere ahead of us which would strike your bare foot and kill you. And whether this be so or not, it will do us no harm to be careful."

This surprized me, because Pedro was not in the habit of being careful, and because I knew he hated to wear boots. Yet I had been with him before when he had got ideas which seemed queer and foolish at the time, but which later led us to strange results; and so, though he was younger than I and sometimes seemed rattle-headed, I had

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learned to put some faith in these odd thoughts of his, even though he himself often did not know what they meant.

But now we said no more about it, and soon we were asleep again. And this time we slept until day.

The rain had stopped when we awoke, but the daylight was dull and the air heavy. We paddled on up the stream, looking often at those low hills to our left.

The country now was rough and broken into many small ravines. And after we had gone some distance, out from one of those ravines came a shout.

We held our paddles and looked, but saw no man. The call came again, and Pedro grunted and pointed; and then I saw in the bush a rubber-tree with something moving on it, like an arm waving to us.

We had noticed a few rubber-trees as we came up, and, being *seringueiros* ourselves, we knew at once what this meant; that there was a small *seringal* here, and that some rubber-worker was doing high tapping on that tree over yonder, having climbed up by a notched pole until he was twenty feet or more above the ground and thus able to see us across the low bush. Turning our canoe, we went to that place.

The man had come down from his perch to meet us as we stepped out. He looked poor and drawn, and we saw that he must work for a hard master, and was undoubtedly one of those debt-slaves so commonly found on the smaller rubber estates. As you probably know, *senhores*, this is the usual system except on such large *seringals* as that of our own old Coronel Nunes—the *patrão* keeps his men bound hand and foot by debt, and they never get out of it.

So now we understood, and were sorry for this man, though of course we did not tell him so. We talked with him and told him who we were and whence we came, and that we now were idle because of the floods, so that we journeyed as we pleased.

He stared at us from hollow-socketed eyes as if he thought this unbelievable. And then he said we were lucky to have a *patrão* who would let us rove away.

When we told him we had no master but were free men and were paid in money for our work he shook his head; but he asked where this place was, where men could go away if they wished. We told him and promised to try to get work for him if he would come there.

But he shook his head again, and we saw that his spirit was dead and that he would never be anything but a slave.

And as we were thinking this he told us in a toneless voice that he worked for a man whom he called Arara—which, as you perhaps know, is the name of a parrot which is both stupid and full of malice. And that one word told us the nature of his master—a loud-mouthed, mean brute.

He told us, too, among other things, that this Arara not only held him hopelessly in debt but had taken his wife away from him and kept her as his own woman. At this we scowled, and Pedro demanded—

"Why have you not stabbed him?"

"I tried to do so," said the man in that same unchanging tone, "but he almost killed me. He beat me and broke my bones, and struck me on the head with a rifle so that I can not think clearly any more. It is no use.

"If you meet him do not tell him you have talked with me. It might get me another beating."

We stood silent, pitying him and not knowing just what to say. After a while Pedro remarked—

"We heard the Mother of the Moon last night, comrade, and her cries seemed to come from here."

The man nodded and answered:

"Yes. Poor creature! She lives in a tree up the *Ygarape do Inferno*—the Creek of Hell. Do not seek her, my friends, for all who approach her meet death."

"How is that?" I asked. "What manner of death?"

"I do not know," he said. "No man knows, though we all know that he who walks too near to her tree falls dead.

"More than one man has died so—men sent by Arara to kill her. He fears her, but he fears also to try to kill her himself. Yet she harms no one who does not hunt for her.

"But remember—do not go to her tree, or you die."

We thought about this, and I wondered if he was crazed, though he did not seem so. And then I remembered my dream, and I asked—

"Is there a great snake at this tree, or a smaller snake such as the *jararaca* or *surucucu*, whose bite is death?"

"No," he told me; "none has been seen there—though no man can say where a

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snake may be found. But the men who died were not killed by snakes. They walked toward the tree, and they fell and died."

He looked over his shoulder as he spoke, and seemed to be growing scared. And when Pedro asked why the man Arara sent men to kill the Mother of the Moon he only said with a faint grin:

"Ask him. And do not tell him you have talked with me."

Then he turned and went back to his tree and swiftly climbed his notched stick and resumed his work. So we got into our canoe and left him behind us.

KNOWING that the headquarters of Arara must be near the water, we kept watching for it as we paddled on; but for some time we saw nothing of any such place. After a while Pedro said:

"I am hungry. Let us stop and eat."

So we went ashore and ate some *chibeh*. And then Pedro took his boots out of the canoe and put them on, and his shirt also, and said, smiling—

"Dress yourself, Lourenço, so that when we meet this Arara we will look like fine gentlemen from Rio."

I laughed but did as he said, putting on my own shirt and boots. Then we sat a little while, smoking after our meal; and I knew Pedro was thinking, and waited for him to speak. As he snapped his cigaret-butt into the water he said:

"Did you notice, Lourenço, that the man down yonder called *a mae da lua* 'poor creature'? It is the first time I ever knew any one to pity the Mother of the Moon, whose cry brings bad luck to those who hear her."

"Yes, I did notice it," I told him. "His mind is not right, as he told us himself; and he probably is sorry for her because she seems in such despair when she cries out."

But he shook his head and said:

"I do not think that is it. But we shall see.

"And there is another thing. If you remember, those terrible sounds seemed to come down the river last night. And the man says the Mother of the Moon lives up the Creek of Hell, which must flow into the stream.

"Now you know that the owl, *a mae da lua*, usually lives far back in the bush, not near a river."

This was true, though I had not thought of it before. And after I pondered on it I asked him what idea he had about this strange bird. But he only grinned and drove his paddle into the water, and we were off with no answer to my question.

Before long we heard a dog barking and soon after that we reached a cleared space on the left bank, where we saw house-roofs over the low bush. So there we went ashore.

There were several small *barracãos* in the clearing, and also one which was quite large. With rifles in hand we swaggered straight up to the biggest house, and there we found Arara. We knew it must be he, because he was an ugly, burly, heavy-faced brute, and because he snarled when he spoke to us.

"Who are you?" he growled, scowling as he looked us over.

His eyes seemed to rest on our boots and so I glanced at his own legs and saw that he had no boots himself. His big feet were bare and caked with dirt.

"We are men from the *seringal* of Coronel Nunes, far north of here," answered Pedro, looking him in the eye.

The squat-bodied man grunted something, and at the name of Coronel Nunes his mouth turned down. I saw he had heard of the *coronel*, and that his sour mind was made more sour at the thought of the *coronel's* wealth.

Looking around the place, I observed that it was little better than if he were an ordinary *seringueiro*. The desk beside him was nothing but an old box. On it stood a big jug of *cachassa*, and beside it lay a heavy, rough whip that would cut the skin off a slave's back at each blow.

He lifted the jug, drank noisily from it, slammed it down on the box and yelled to somebody. Out from behind a palm-leaf screen that made another room at our right came a woman—a thin, frightened-looking woman who moved like a dog expecting a kick.

We knew that she must be the wife of the dull-minded fellow whom we had met down the river, but of course we said nothing. The man Arara snarled at her, and she quickly brought another jug of liquor and took away the one he had just emptied.

He drank again without offering us any, and sat a while glowering at us. And then he began to boast.

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He was as rich as Coronel Nunes, he declared; and he had a great *seringal* and many men, and he got very high prices for his rubber because it was better than that of Coronel Nunes or any other man. Of course we could see with half an eye that these were only loud lies born of drink and jealousy; we knew that he probably was much in debt and had to depend for his living on what he could get from some trader.

But we let him talk, and he pounded his box with a dirty fist and took other drooling drinks from his jug, until he was through telling us what a great man he was. Then he asked us what we wanted.

"We are seeking nothing, *senhor*," said Pedro, pretending to be respectful, "except the life of a bird. Last night we could not sleep because of the infernal noise of *a mae da lua*, and we vowed that if we could find that bird we would kill it. So now, seeing your headquarters here, we came ashore thinking you might tell us where to hunt for it."

THE black eyes of Arara opened wide. Then a cunning expression grew on his face, and he suddenly became friendly.

"Ah, yes, that bird!" he said. "Sit down, friends. Have a drink."

He kept his chair, and there was nothing else to sit on but the box-desk, so we remained standing. He bawled at the woman, and she brought small gourds, and into these he slopped some of the liquor.

"Drink!" he insisted, and so we drank, finding the *cachassa* good enough. "That hellish Mother of the Moon, she should be killed," he went on. "I have thought of killing her myself, but I have been too busy with the affairs of my estate.

"You can find her easily enough. Go to the *Ygarape do Inferno*, which is below here—you must have passed it while coming up the stream; it runs into the river, and you will know it by two big *murumuru* palms at its mouth. Paddle up this until you find an old tree blown across the creek which you can not pass in your canoe.

"Then walk to the right until you reach a big hollow tree. And as soon as you see anything moving there, shoot quickly and the Mother of the Moon will trouble you no more. Have another drink, my friends."

Pedro replied that we were strangers here and so it would not be easy for us to find that tree as it was to tell us about it, and we would like to have him go with us. But this he refused to do, saying he was too busy.

And he began looking around as if trying to find something that would make him seem busy. But there was nothing except the jug, and so he became busy with that, taking another huge drink.

"Why must we shoot at once, *senhor*?" I asked. "Is there a large snake or other deadly thing?"

"No," he answered quickly; "there is no danger of any kind. But you must shoot because the bird is old and wise and will surely escape if you fail to fire as soon as you see a movement. No, there is no danger, friends; none at all."

We looked straight at him for a moment without saying anything; and he could not meet our eyes, but looked down at the floor. Then Pedro said:

"We do not care to beat about in the bush for a day or two seeking the Mother of the Moon. So since you will not show us the way we shall go on and let her live and wail to you. We know that you are not afraid to go up that creek and that you can kill her yourself when you have time."

Those were his words, *senhores*; but the tone he used and his little smile were worse than if he had called Arara a coward and a liar. And they stung that drink-soaked brute into rage. He pounded the desk so that the house shook and roared that he feared nothing on earth or in a hotter place.

And as we turned to go, both grinning, he bounced up, grabbed a rifle from a corner, and snarled that he would go and show us the way—and also that he would stay and kill that cursed Mother of the Moon after we fled from her in fear.

Down to our canoe we went with him; and even in that short walk we saw to it that he did not get behind both of us at the same time, for we trusted him no more than a snake. And we did not take him into our dugout, but let him get into another tied at the bank.

Still growling like a dog with a bone, he drove his paddle into the water as if he meant to break it. And with him leading the three of us went swiftly down-stream toward the Creek of Hell.

As he had said, two *murumuru* palms marked that little stream, their giant fronds

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curving across its mouth and almost concealing it. When we drove between them we found a creek which was narrow and winding but deep, so that it was easy enough to get up in a canoe.

It was full of snakes—*jararacas*—which stuck their deadly heads up out of the water as we passed, and we killed a number of them with the edges of our paddles. But we met nothing that could harm us while we stayed in our dugouts.

When we reached the big fallen tree that blocked further progress we pulled our canoes out on the right bank and stood looking into the bush. We could not see much, for the jungle was thick and the light was dim.

And as we stood there I thought again of my dream, in which I had walked through a dark forest to a hollow tree where Death reached for my feet. I almost expected to hear the Mother of the Moon cry out. But no sound came to us, and I motioned to Arara to go ahead.

He hung back. He had worked out his rage in paddling up here, and now his loud-mouthed, fist-pounding bravery was leaving him.

The more he looked at the dark tangle ahead the less he wanted to go into it. But we stood there, saying nothing but looking him in the eye, until he clamped his jaws together and started on his way.

He could travel in the bush—I will say that for him. He made scarcely any sound, and he cut his way like a veteran bushman. But he went slowly, and at times he stopped to listen.

As we went farther into the dimness he paused more often. At length he quit.

"I have a pain in my leg," he said. "Go ahead, friends, straight ahead, and I will follow."

"We will wait until your pain has passed," Pedro told him with a mocking grin.

He grumbled something and rubbed one leg, squinting at us and at the bush. Fear was in his face now; and I remembered what the rubber-worker down-stream had told us of this place, and I too scanned the jungle narrowly.

"THE tree is just ahead," Arara whispered hoarsely. "It is across an *ygarape* and up a little hill. The bush is very thick and tangled except at one place.

"You who have vowed to kill that—that bird, go in at that place and shoot at once into the hollow of the tree if anything moves. I will wait a little farther away, where I can fire if *a mae da lua* should come out above you. Between us she can not escape."

It sounded fair enough, and we nodded. But Pedro and I glanced at each other, determined that this man should not stay at our backs. We waited stubbornly until he saw we would not go ahead of him, and then he recovered from his "pain" and started on, slipping along very quietly on his bare feet.

We followed, trying to make no noise with our boots. And so we worked down across the *ygarape*, into which we had to wade up to our waists, and up the little hill.

There through the dusky bush we made out a great tree rising high up until it was lost in the leaves and branches and vines overhead.

We could not see the lower part of this tree, for the low bush was matted so thickly that it shut out all sight of the butt. Only the great trunk, towering up and up until it disappeared, was before our eyes, gloomy and still and dreadful, the home of the Mother of the Moon, watching over the place where men dropped dead. I felt a chill creep down my back as I looked at it.

Then came a soft hiss from Arara. He pointed a thumb sidewise and stole silently away to the left. We followed.

The bush thinned suddenly. The tangle seemed to swing inward toward the tree.

And then there was no bush, but a clear space where we could look straight at the huge butt. In it yawned a large hole, black as night.

In that black hole we could see nothing. No sound came to us. Nothing moved. The tree seemed dead and empty.

Yet as we stood silently watching it over me crept a feeling that it also was watching us. There seemed to be eyes in it—eyes which we could not see, but which we could feel glowering at us in hate.

And though I hope I am no coward I did not want to go up to that black hole. I wanted to back away and leave the place to itself.

Then came a sound—a slight clicking sound beside me, where Arara stood. Swiftly I looked at him and found his face yellow-white. He was quivering with fear,

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and his teeth were chattering together, making the noise I had heard.

I glanced beyond him to Pedro, who was watching him too. My comrade's face was grim and his eyes narrowed. Moved by the same impulse, we seized Arara.

"This is the place where men die," I said. "Yes, we know it. And now you will go up to that tree with us. If we die, we all die together."

With a terrified gasp he tried to jerk away. But we gripped him hard and held him.

"No, no!" he croaked. "I am sick. Let me stay here, I beg of you. I will protect you from anything——"

"We will protect ourselves!" Pedro cut in. "You have said you would kill the Mother of the Moon when we fled in fear. Now show us how brave you are."

And he shoved him toward the tree.

Again Arara tried to break away, but we kept our grip on him. We called him coward and other things, and told him we would go with him. But still he hung back.

So, each of us holding him with one hand and carrying our rifles ready in the other, we forced him ahead. And the three of us advanced in a solid line.

Suddenly we tripped and nearly fell. Something in the low, rank growth had caught our feet. We staggered, but our close hold on one another helped us to keep from falling. I kicked at the thing and saw it was a vine. Stepping over this, we went forward again.

"My feet!" groaned Arara, jerking back. "There are thorns!"

We halted. It was only another of his excuses, I thought, to keep back. But we were getting nearer to the tree now, and I was willing to stop and watch that black hole.

We stood there for a time peering at it and listening. As before, we saw no life, heard no movement.

Then my left arm began to ache. Arara was dragging down on it. Instead of holding him from escaping, I was now holding him up.

Looking at him, I saw that his head drooped forward. His eyes stared blankly at the ground. His mouth hung open. His heavy body pulled harder and harder on my arm. All at once his knees gave way and he collapsed.

We dropped him. He fell and lay still.

When I stooped and shook him he showed no life. I turned him over face upward and we stared at him.

"*Por Deus!*" muttered Pedro. "He is dead!"

It was so. Without a struggle or a sound the man had died on his feet. Nothing had attacked him; nothing had even threatened him; yet he was as dead as if shot through the head.

Then from that black, awful tree before us broke a horrible cry. It struck us cold.

We stood as if held in traps, neither moving nor breathing, straining our eyes at the hollow opening in the great trunk. And still we saw nothing there.

As the cry broke out again we jerked up our rifles and fired into the blackness. We threw new cartridges into the barrel and fired those also.

We shot until our guns were empty, fighting against we knew not what. It did no good. Weird, terrible, the cries kept on.

Senhores, we turned and ran. If only something had come at us we would have fought it with our empty rifles.

But this thing that we could not see, this thing that had struck Arara dead in our clutch and now screamed on after we had fired bullets enough to kill a dozen men—it was more than flesh and blood could bear. We jumped away.

But we did not run far. We could not run far if we wished; for we ran into the tangle of bush, and it stopped us. We could not go farther without swinging our machetes and chopping our way.

But, having stopped, we did not try to go on. Instead we reloaded our rifles and stood listening and looking back.

"*A mae da lua!*" said Pedro.

And as the cries continued I too recognized them as the wails of the Mother of the Moon. And scared though I was I wondered that the bird should scream in the day-time.

While I thought of this the noise stopped. Dead silence followed. For a time we stood quiet. Then Pedro whispered—

"I am going back."

SLOWLY and stealthily we crept back, making no sound. As we came out at the edge of the tangle Pedro laid a hand on my chest and stopped me. And we stood staring in amazement at what we saw.

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The black hole was not empty now. In it we could make out a human figure, standing motionless there in the gloom.

After a time this figure moved. It came slowly out, a shadow among the jungle shadows, until we could see it well.

And then we were more amazed than before. For that creeping, silent thing was a woman!

A woman, *senhores*, without clothing, as naked and wild as any jungle beast. A thin, starved-looking Indian woman whose long black hair hung down around her in a matted mass, whose teeth showed in a mad grin, whose eyes were fixed on the body of Arara. She moved toward him now, but not in a straight line as any one would naturally walk. Instead she went a step forward, then a step to the right; then another step, forward, and a step to the left. And in this queer zigzag way she came to the bulky body of the man who had led us there.

Then she laughed. It was a laugh without real laughter—a wild screeching noise that showed she was utterly crazed.

She stamped a foot on his upturned face and laughed louder than ever. And then she stepped on his chest and, standing there, broke out into those dismal cries we had heard coming from the tree where she hid. She, this mad woman, was the Mother of the Moon.

Her voice was that of the owl, and so loud that it would carry far out into the jungle. And as she howled she stood with her head up and her eyes closed, throwing all her strength into noise.

I felt a quick tug on my arm from Pedro and as I looked at him he made motions as of seizing the woman and lifting her. I nodded, and we slipped swiftly forward. Before she knew we were there we grabbed her.

"Up!" grunted Pedro. "Lift her up!"

I did so. Holding her in the air, we rushed back to the thick bush before we let her down.

She screeched and bit and scratched and kicked, fighting in a frenzy to get away. She was quick as a cat, and surprizingly strong. But we held her without much difficulty, and when her feet were on the ground Pedro said:

"Be still! We shall not harm you."

Still she struggled. But he bent and stared hard into her eyes, repeating his command and telling her over and over that we meant no evil. And before long she stopped fighting and stood quiet, breathing hard and glancing rapidly from one to the other of us.

Now that we had caught the Mother of the Moon we did not know what to do with her. We could not keep holding her, and we felt that if we loosed her she would escape us.

As we stood looking down at her I noticed that she was not a *cabocla*, or copper-colored woman, but quite light of skin. She reminded me of a light-colored tribe of wild people whom I had met in other days.

Her eyes, too, were like theirs, being set straight in her face, not slanting; and her cheek-bones were not so high as those found in most Indians here in the borderland of Peru and Brazil.

These things I noticed in a glance, but I thought nothing of them until later; for the problem now was how to keep her quiet while we explored her tree.

"Tie her up," said Pedro.

So while he held her I slashed off some bush-rope and wound it firmly around her. She fought again, but we tried to make her understand that we should free her later on.

And then, leaving her tightly tied, we picked up the rifles we had dropped and went up to the black hollow from which she had come.

It was large enough, that hollow, to hold the hammocks of half a dozen men. But it contained nothing at all so far as we could see except a notched pole running upward.

Unable to see anything in the gloom above us, we shouted. Getting no answer, we fired. Nothing fell, except splinters.

And then, satisfied that there was no living thing there but ourselves, we cut dry wood from the tree and made a torch and I climbed up that notched ladder.

I climbed to the height of three tall men before I found anything. As I reached the top of the ladder I saw, slung across the hole, which was smaller here than at the base, a sort of hammock.

It was made of vines and fibers woven and knotted together and fastened to two wooden pins, hard as iron, driven into the tree at each end. It was empty. Beside it, sticking out from the wood, was a rusty

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old machete. And these two things—the woman's rough bed and the bush-knife—were all that I could find.

At one end of the hammock a little light came in from a small hole in the trunk. Twisting about and balancing myself partly by the ladder and partly by the hammock, I got into a position where I could look through that hole.

It was only a slit, but I found myself peering down at the body of Arara. Lying in her bed, the woman could watch whatever went on in front of her refuge.

The thought came to me that she might be able to shoot a dart through that slit; and though I knew Arara had not been shot I looked all about for some weapon of the sort. But there was none—no blow-gun, no arrows, no bow nor other Indian weapon.

The smoke from my torch grew thick and stung my eyes and choked me. And so, dropping it, I got down the pole as fast as I could.

"There is no snake or other deadly thing above us," I told Pedro. "There is nothing but a hammock and a machete. The hammock is high, and that is why our bullets did not harm the woman when we shot into this hole—she was above them.

"But I can find nothing to show why men should drop dead when they come here."

He stood frowning out at the ground. And I went on:

"Nothing has harmed us. There is nothing here that the woman could use to strike men down before they came inside this tree. Yet there lies Arara, who died silently on his feet."

"Yes," Pedro nodded. "As you say, *on his feet.* You and I, Lourenço, wear boots, and no harm has come to us. Arara wore no boots, and death came to him. And the last thing he said was:

"'My feet! There are thorns!'

"And remember how the woman came out to him—not straight forward, but stepping aside as if following a queer crooked path which she had often traveled, so that she knew it without looking at it. Let us look at this ground outside, and see what we shall see."

SO WE walked out, stepping carefully and pushing the undergrowth aside with our rifle-butts and peering at the ground. And we found that Arara had spoken truth before he died. There were thorns.

The earth was full of them—long thorns which never had grown there, but had been planted firmly with their sharp points sticking straight up. No living thing could cross that space without wounding its feet on those spikes, unless it wore heavy boots like ours or followed a secret path.

Thinking of this, we searched for such a path, remembering how the barefooted woman had come out. And we found that too—a narrow, snaky sort of path free from thorns, which could not be seen by any one who did not know exactly where it was.

Following it, we passed Arara and reached the vine which had tripped us. A few feet beyond that vine there were no thorns.

"Lourenço, your dream was true," said my comrade. "Death reached for our feet. Even though we wore boots we should have fallen over that vine if we had not been clutching Arara; and, falling, we should have struck our hands on the thorns."

"But," I objected, "I have hurt myself many times on thorns, Pedro, and so have you, and it did us no harm except for the pain."

He smiled as he answered.

"Yes. But possibly these thorns are poisoned."

Then a flash of memory came to me and I understood.

"You are right," I told him. "It must be as you say. I have seen this sort of death-trap before, though I had forgotten it.

"Twice I have lived for a little time among man-eating *barbaros* with light skins like that woman yonder. They brew a strange poison from vine-roots and *tucandeira* ants, and into this they dip the tips of arrows and blow-gun darts; and any creature scratched by these poisoned tips dies swiftly and silently, even as Arara died.

"And these savages make traps in the jungle to protect their *maloca*, or tribal house, from enemies. And one of these traps is made by planting in patches of ground the barbed tail-bones of that flat devil-fish, the *araya.* They smear those sharp points with that poison, and any man stepping on them soon falls dead.

"This woman must be of that tribe; and, not being able to get the bones of the *araya*, she has used instead those long, hard thorns. It is very simple. I wonder that I did not think of it before."

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Smiling again, he said:

"Anything is simple when once you understand it. I myself did not know how the swift deaths of men who came here were brought about, though I felt that it might be something on the ground. That was why I told you to lift the woman into the air when we seized her.

"Now let us take her down to the house of Arara. There are things which I do not yet understand, but I think we shall find the answer there."

We went to her and explained that we were about to take her for a ride on the water. At once she began to screech and struggle.

So we did not free her, but picked her up and carried her. As we could not carry Arara too, we left him where he lay.

At our canoe she tried again to fight. Thinking of the snake-filled stream ahead, we put her into Arara's canoe and fastened her tightly, so that she could not roll herself overboard to her death. And then, towing in a dead man's boat the mad Mother of the Moon, we paddled swiftly back down the gloomy Creek of Hell.

The dim day grew darker, and night was almost upon us when we once more climbed the bank at the headquarters of Arara. Men were there whom we had not seen before—*seringueiros* whose day's work was done, and who now had come in to huddle through the night in their huts in fear of their brutal *patrão*.

As we went toward the house, carrying the woman, they gathered around us, staring in astonishment at our burden. But no man spoke until we passed the hut of a sick man who had seen us go away. He called—

"Where is Arara?"

"Dead," answered Pedro.

We stopped and watched their faces. For a moment they looked doubtfully at us. And one asked:

"Is that truth? Is the *patrão* dead?"

"Dead," nodded Pedro. "He died at the tree of the Mother of the Moon. And we bring with us that Mother herself."

There was a silence. Then arose a yell—a yell of joy, *senhores*, that they were free men.

They pressed around us, seizing us in friendly hands and slapping our shoulders as if we had delivered them from a great evil. But we pushed them aside, and I told them:

"The body of Arara lies where it fell, before the hollow tree. You can bring him back and bury him."

They quieted for a moment. Then some man shouted:

"Bury him? Let the accursed one lie there and rot!"

The others took up the cry—

"Let him rot!"

And we saw that every man of them hated his *patrão*, and that Arara had not one friend. The only one who did not cry out curses on the dead man was that *seringueiro* whom we had first seen down the river—the one who was slow of thought because of the brain-injury he had received when he tried to save his wife. Now he stood a little way off by himself, watching and trying to realize that he need fear Arara no more.

As I looked at him he turned and ran toward the large *barracão*. And I knew he had gone to tell that wife, who now was his own again, that they were free.

We followed him, and all the others trooped beside us. As we reached the house night fell, sudden and black.

But the men got lights, and then we cut away the bush-ropes that bound the Mother of the Moon—though I still held her by one arm to keep her from making a dash into the darkness. But she stood quiet, looking around her in a way that made me think she might have been there before.

Then Pedro told how Arara had died and explained the trap of the poisoned thorns and described our capture of the woman.

WHEN the tale was done he beckoned to the man with the slow brain, who stood with his wife at the opening of the palm-leaf screen.

"When we talked with you down the river," he said, "you called the Mother of the Moon 'poor creature.' That seemed strange to us then, but now we can see that you knew she was not an owl.

"Tell us what you know of her, and why Arara wanted her killed. Did he have reason to fear her?"

"Yes, he did," the man answered in his slow way. "He had every reason to fear her. He was the one who made her what she is.

"Her mind was wrecked by the same thing that has dulled my own—brutal abuse, beatings and kicks and blows on the head.

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Lift up her hair and you will see that her body is covered with scars made by terrible beatings with a whip."

We looked. It was true.

"She was his woman for a long time," he went on. "He bought her from a gang of Peruvian *caucheros* who had raided the village of a wild tribe of light-colored people somewhere to the east of us and had captured her and other young women.

"He bought her like a dog, and he treated her worse than a dog. Many a time we have shivered as we heard her scream under the lash. And at length he beat her so cruelly with the butt end of his whip—which is loaded with lead—that he almost killed her.

"Then he threw her out of this *barracão* in the night to die. And she would have died, only she crawled to my house over yonder, and my wife hid her in the bush and secretly took care of her, so that she lived. But she lived with a twisted brain, and soon she disappeared.

"After a time there came a still night of moonlight, and all that night we heard the cries of *a mae da lua*, coming from the *Ygarape do Inferno*. As you know, to hear that cry is bad luck.

"Arara cursed, and the next day he sent two men to find and kill the bird. One of them came back.

"He said the other man, walking ahead of him toward a great hollow tree, suddenly fell dead. He ran away, for he was afraid.

"And though it was day-time, and so there was no moon, he heard behind him as he ran the cries of the Mother of the Moon. And we too had heard them over here at our work.

"There were men among us who did not believe this man's tale, or did not fear *a mae da lua;* and when Arara promised to free them from debt if they would kill that bird they went to do it—sometimes alone, sometimes by twos.

"At least seven men went so. And every time we would hear those awful cries. And no man returned.

"Then Arara sent me. He made many promises, and he had not yet taken my wife from me, and I did not know he was sending me because he wanted me killed so that he could have her. He promised me so much that I was willing to dare death, and I went alone to the hollow tree.

"But when I came near it I grew afraid. And so, keeping as far away as I could, I hid in the thick bush and watched it a long time.

"I saw that no dead men lay there and that those who had died had been taken away by something. There was nothing to show that death was near me. But I could not go up to that tree.

"Then a queer thing happened. Up overhead a monkey got to fighting with something and was knocked out of the branches.

"He fell on the ground near the big tree. It did not hurt him, and he started to run up a palm. But suddenly he stopped, hung there a few seconds, and dropped dead to the ground.

"And then out from that tree came this woman. She walked in a queer way, stepping to this side and that until she reached the monkey.

"She picked him up, went back to the tree and disappeared. And I knew she was the Mother of the Moon, who made those fearful noises, and that she had some way of killing anything that came too close.

"I did not try to kill her, for I knew who she was and why she was crazed, and I pitied her. I went away very quietly, and came back here and told Arara what I had discovered.

"He was amazed, and then he was furious that I had not killed her; and from that day he has feared that she would come by night and kill him in his sleep.

"But he never dared go himself to that death-tree of hers and try to slay her. I do not know why he went today unless you shamed him into it."

"We did," nodded Pedro. "He was very brave when he started, but when we neared the tree we had to drag him."

Another man spoke.

"Yes, that was Arara—big in talk, small in deeds. And I think he went also because he intended to have you killed. He knew that only men who came near the tree fell dead.

"He hoped the three of you could kill the Mother of the Moon, but he planned to stand back and let you strangers be killed also. Then perhaps he could drag you back with a pole and get those fine new boots of yours, and your rifles and everything else you had."

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NOW all this time the mad woman had stood quiet, looking about her. And all this time the other woman, the wife of the *seringueiro*, had been half-hiding behind that palm screen. As we stopped talking this woman came out and stepped toward her man.

And whether the Mother of the Moon was angered at seeing another woman here where she had lived so long I do not know —who can tell what passes in such a mind as hers? But with a sudden scream she wrenched her hands out of my grasp and sprang like a she-jaguar, her long nails curving like claws, at the face of the rubber-worker's wife.

She did not reach her, for the other woman turned and ran, crying out in terror. We men all jumped to seize the mad woman. But we stumbled over one another in our haste, and no man seemed able to seize and hold her.

As I have said, she was quick as a cat, and now she slashed at men's eyes with those claws of hers, tearing their faces and squirming away from their clutching hands. Then she leaped up on the old box-desk and sprang straight out, striking two men on their heads and knocking them down among the rest of us. And when we were all on our feet again she was gone.

Somewhere outside in the black night we heard a screaming laugh. It died away toward the jungle, and we knew the wild creature was fleeing back to the bush. And no man followed.

"Let her go," said Pedro. "Her life is her own, not ours. Let her go back to her tree or wherever else she wills, and live as it pleases her."

"That is right," said one of the men. "She has never harmed any one except those who went to kill her. She never cries out except after a kill or when the great bright moon makes a night for *a mae da lua*.

"And we shall not hear her again, for all of us will leave this place tomorrow and come back no more. So let her go."

Then he grinned and added—

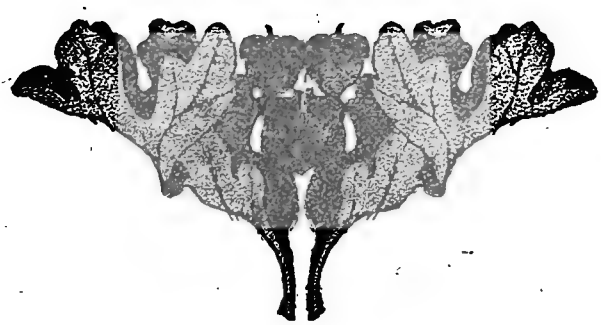
"Let us now drink our good wishes to her in the *cachassa* of Arara."

And that is what we did. We drank not once but many times; for whatever else may be said of Arara his *cachassa* was strong and good and plentiful.

And while he lay out in the dark, caught by the doom to which he had sent more than one man, his *barracão* rang with the shouts of the men who rejoiced at his death and feared him no more.

So, *senhores*, that is the story of the Mother of the Moon—a poor crazed creature who made a death-trap only that she might live, and who did live to stamp on the face of the man who had made her what she was. She may be living yet in her hollow tree, furtive and silent except on such a night as this, when the moon-madness moves her to pour out those dolorous cries that chill the blood of all who hear.

What became of her only the great green jungle can tell. And the jungle tells few tales.



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Just Before the Dawn*

By Raymond S. Harris

Author of "The Battle of St. Paul's Cathedral."

DAY had wearied of its work and night of its pleasure. The city was motionless in its heaviest sleep. It was that stale hour of the early morn when the very air tastes fagged and flat; when weariness drags the tired limbs, yet calls for stimulus rather than repose.

The indistinct figure of a man drifted swiftly down the street, as quickly and quietly as a leaf blown by the keen Autumn wind, hastening in brief journeys, pausing in a shadow, borne on again. He hesitated before a bleary all-night lunchroom, was decided by a chill gust from the river and went in.

Yawning, the waiter brought coffee and rolls, and the guest twined himself around the tall stool, mumbling and sipping, caring for neither. The waiter slumped down in his chair again, already half-asleep.

Only a tarnished alarm clock in a shelf-corner bridged the span between the fleeting merriment of midnight and the hurrying hours of the morning. Its alert ticking dominated the interval.

A cold draft from the door told the luncher that it had opened quietly, and he watched in the hazy mirror against the wall the couple who entered and stood hesitant a moment, gaging the place, before taking seats next him. The waiter smeared the counter in front of them with a few perfunctory gyrations of a dirty cloth and stood heavily expectant.

"What can we get for a dime apiece?" the young fellow blurted out.

"Coffee and rolls or crullers, or a piece of pie."

"Not coffee and any kind of a sandwich, eh?"

"Nope," the waiter said, stifling another yawn. "Sandwiches is a dime alone."

The youngster leaned toward the girl.

"You get coffee and a sandwich," he whispered, "and I'll take some rolls."

"No, I won't, Fred," she said vehemently. "We've started to fifty-fifty it, and you've got to play fair."

"Give me a cup of coffee and some rolls if you please," she ordered the waiter.

"Same," her partner said, smiling wearily at her.

The first comer still watched the pair in his hazy mirror. At a venture one might put them down as a couple from some co-educational college out West, who had decided to cut their classes forever and brave the real world hand in hand.

They were finding the world a grudging place, one might say. That coffee tasted too good to be a frequent draft; and they downed the meager rolls in a few hungry gulps.

Then they lingered to gather up the crums, to drain the coffee-cups and gaze covertly around the place as if they enjoyed its warmth and the rest and the smell of food.

"This one is on me," the man next them

**This is an Off-the-Trail story.* *See second contents page.*

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said suddenly, smiling at the two. "Bring the lady and gentleman coffee and sandwiches and a piece of pie each."

"Oh, we can't accept that—" began the young fellow.

"Yes, we can too, Fred," his companion broke in, her hand on his arm. "We both need it—and we can pay it back. Thank you," she said gravely. "We will be delighted to accept."

When they had finished she turned to their host again and smiled.

"That was fine," she thanked him, "and it was good of you to offer it."

Then she walked over and put out her hand, and the boy came along too and gave their new friend a hard grip. He laughed at their thanks and proffered a cigar; the three of them sat there, suddenly chummy, along the counter.

"This is the first real party since our marriage," the youth said with a dry grin. "This man's town is a tough one to break into."

There was a question in his voice.

"You recall my first go at it," the older man answered, smiling too. "New York is a hard proposition—till you get in right. Then it comes fast."

They snuggled up to him like a couple of children.

"So many people do make good here," the girl said. "I know *we* can once we get our feet on the bottom rung."

"I know you can too," their host told them.

The waiter, who had been hanging near on a vigorous pretense of cleaning the encrusted counter, was given the cigar he was after, and he leaned back and blew a fat smoke-ring.

"You said it," he confirmed. "It's just in trying long enough."

"After all," the girl continued, "we have only been trying for four weeks."

She nodded encouragingly to her husband.

"This may be our lucky day."

"Luck runs in freshets," the older man said slowly, "and you ought to have something to keep up the supply between freshets—to regulate the flow."

He looked at the two again, then off, and finally with a quick movement reached for his hat, which was lying next him on the counter.

"Look at this."

His fingers flashed along the lining and then slid into a little slit or pocket, producing something that caught the white light from a globe overhead and gave it back in a shower of sparkles.

"That was my regulator," he chuckled.

"What a beautiful thing," the girl breathed, turning the brooch from side to side and watching the light play in among the facets of the jewels. "What a treasure to be carrying around New York at this hour though!"

"That's the point of the whole matter," the man laughed.

He took the brooch back and slipped it into the hat again.

"Nobody would search for it there, would they? And I try not to leave the hat hanging on a peg in some restaurant.

"That diamond has a name. It's called the Helper. I don't know who named it, for it has been the property of more different people than any precious stone in the world, I should say. I don't know when it was named either, because it is so old.

"No one can say how long it was in India. Then it found its way to Italy, from there to France, and finally it was brought to this country as a talisman with which to win success in the New World.

"Somewhere on the journey it acquired its name and characteristics. It is a helper of the struggling and an enemy of the wealthy. My stepmother told me that when it is aiding its poor owner it sparkles with a warm and happy light; but when its owner has become rich and yet retains the stone its rays turn to sharp and stinging ones that show its displeasure.

"Whoever owns this can not own it long. It always brings success—but when success has come the possessor must pass the gem on to some one who needs its aid or suffer the Helper's anger. It can help to death as well as to riches."

THE narrator paused and smiled at the group.

"That's a queer idea to have about a diamond, isn't it?" he remarked, looking at them closely. "There are funny stories connected with precious stones, and this one dates back through the generations, implicitly believed in.

"There are many evidences of its power, I assure you. While you need aid it will aid you; when you keep the stone out of covetousness and no longer require its assistance

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it begins to hate you and to plan a way to get free, even if over your dead body."

"Don't you want to sell that—real cheap?" the waiter asked. "I sure need it."

His attempted grin denied its own assumption of levity.

"When sold it is just an ordinary diamond to the possessor, and it never fails to take its revenge upon the seller," the diamond's owner said, shaking his head. "If you are buying diamonds you can get the same thing in any jewelry store. Only when given does it possess its unaccountable qualities. Only when given to some one in need."

Outside a train on the elevated railway rattled up, roared past and sped away. The older man sat musing, and began speaking again without raising his head.

"I was born down South, and when only a few months old my mother died. Perhaps I was two years of age when my father met and married a young French girl in New Orleans—a sweet and gentle woman.

"Just before their meeting her aunt had given her the Helper with the story of its power. The aunt had become wealthy; her niece was poor and an orphan. It was only a horrible accident to her son that led the aunt to part with the stone, her superstitious soul torn with the thought that but for the tardiness of the gift her boy might have escaped.

"Well, shortly after that and through a most unusual happening my father and my foster-mother met, and she always declared that the Helper brought about the meeting. Certain it is that they began to prosper from the day of their wedding, and the time would soon have come for the diamond to change hands were it not for my father's death.

"He left everything to my mother, but she knew so little of business that the money soon went and we were undoubtedly in dire straits until my stepmother's charm won a second husband, a man of considerable wealth. She gave entire credit to the Helper again, and this only increased her delight in the jewel.

"During our period of struggle, before she married for the second time, she had pledged the diamond upon one occasion and then worked desperately until she had made the money with which to redeem it.

"My foster-father said that in this lay the power of the Helper—that the poor owner pawned it, learned thrift and acquired the money-getting instinct in winning it back, so prospering. Such may be the only power it has, and if you are practical you may agree with him.

"Not so with my stepmother, however. She knew and without doubt believed at least a score of stories concerning the Helper, and I delighted in hearing them.

"Indeed, the gem was my 'Arabian Nights,' my 'Alice in Wonderland,' my book of fairy-stories, for when bedtime came I could always tease my young foster-mother into telling me again some reputed deed of the Helper—stories that unfailingly had happy endings unless the owner sought to keep the diamond after it had brought him his heart's desire.

"'See!' I once cried. 'Look how as you talk its light has grown angry, just in remembrance of that day!'

"But my stepmother paled and silenced me.

"'Hush!' she said. 'Its light has not changed. That only happens when it is angry at its owner. The time hasn't come yet—it may not come for years and years. Who knows what may happen to me again? I need the Helper still.'

"From the beginning my new father despised me. In the first place I was no kin of his nor of his wife, but a ward that unkind fortune had thrust upon him. And secondly he was ardently desirous of a son; and when the years passed and none came he resented my presence more and more.

"Upon his death some years after the marriage it was not surprizing that he left everything to his wife in trust with the express stipulation that none of it was to be given me either directly or in any indirect way upon penalty of having the entire estate diverted to a public charity.

"There was only one possession of my stepmother's not covered by the will, and that was her own property—the Helper. Surely it must have been in her mind to give me this when I left her home and started North to make my way alone.

"But hers had become the greed of the miser, and though she wept hysterically upon my departure and tried to bring herself to make the gift she could not. Days before my going I saw her with the diamond, sometimes at her neck or upon her breast, sometimes held in her hands while she

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delighted in it, at the last hidden away somewhere to keep it out of my sight and if possible out of my mind.

"I was too proud to mention the Helper, and indeed I had no claim whatever upon the jewel except the very shadowy one that I was poor enough and at a crisis of need while she had riches and was assured of them for life.

"A dozen times she had me promise to write her and give every change of address, and she said over and over—

" 'Perhaps I will have something to send you—perhaps I will be able to help you if you keep always in touch.'

"I knew she feared that the Helper would turn its anger upon her. She would be watching in terror to see that its light did not turn to rage. Then she would send it—but though she trembled she could not give it to me at that time.

"WHAT torment she went through during the next few years I can only guess. I know that I had become definitely fixed in her mind as the rightful possessor of the Helper, yet she could not resign her stewardship.

"Later I learned that she had placed the jewel in a vault and left it there for months; then got it out at last, and kept it by her more constantly than before. Again she had sought the money to purchase a diamond of the same size and thought to send that other one to me secretly; but her lawyer had reminded her of the provisions of the will and she had relinquished the idea in a panic.

"I had been careful to send each change of address back to my old home, but it was perhaps five years after I had started out into the world that I received the first letter from my stepmother. By that time I was existing in a poor room on the East Side, back of a store.

"I had been sick, and was about at the end of my rope. Perhaps the Helper knew this. At any rate the letter came one day; just a hurried scrawl written under great nervous stress, mailed hurriedly on the same impulse. She seemed afraid that she would again fail. The letter read:

"I am coming to New York to give you the Helper, as I should have done long ago. It has become a thing of blazing rage, and I do not dare to keep it longer. I promise the Helper that I will start tomorrow.

"That was all. I waited a week and heard nothing more. Then the second week came to a close, and a third.

"During my illness the old storekeeper, Mrs. Small, had come back to help me about when I was too weak to move unaided and to bring me some part of her meals, such as a sick person might fancy. After the arrival of the letter I told her of the Helper, and I used to sit in the store watching while between customers we discussed every possible cause for the delay of the messenger.

" 'She just hates to give it up,' Mrs. Small assured me. 'It'll get to you all right; don't worry.'

"But I had to worry, sick and penniless as I was, for I needed the money I knew the Helper would bring from the pawnshop.

"Every morning I took up my station in the store, and when driven by fatigue back to my bed I left the door open, and waited and listened.

"One evening in the fourth week I was lying down in my room when the telephone up in the store rang. Next I heard Mrs. Small hurrying down the hall, and I sprang up and came out shaking.

" 'It's a woman's voice,' she said. 'I think—but no; you go see!'

"It was my stepmother.

" 'Come, Phil!' she gasped over the wire. 'I am up at the Belloit. I've been here three weeks trying to—trying to— Hurry! If you get here in time the Helper may relent. In God's name—hurry!'

"I made all the haste I could, of course, pricked by a thousand horrors, but it was a long way across the city to the big hotel, and more than once I had to stop and lean gasping against some building wall until I recovered strength to go on. When I arrived at the Belloit, disheveled and breathless, and asked for my stepmother the clerk at the desk gave me a measuring look and then went back behind the screen to whisper with some one.

"He came back then, and with two men eying me from the rear called a boy and sent me up to her room. She had phoned the desk and a physician had gone there at once, and a priest had been summoned from the parish-house almost across the street.

"But only the priest could help her. She died soon after his arrival.

"My stepmother's body was lying on the bed, one arm outstretched as if giving something, and in her hand was the Helper,

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spotted with her blood. There was a bandage round her throat, and blood-stains over the floor and the bed-covering. I knew whose work that was.

" 'She left this with me for you,' the priest said, handing me a paper which like everything else was blood-spattered.

"On it was written, in a hand at which death was tugging—

"Give this brooch, the Helper, to my stepson, for it is his.

" 'Did you know that she intended to give you this diamond?' he asked.

"I showed him the letter she had sent me, and he turned slowly and made above her the sign of the cross.

" 'It is a happening,' he muttered. 'Just a happening—but a terrible one!'

"I learned the story from him as she had told it. For three weeks she had been there wrestling with her juster self while the Helper burned with sullen anger or blazed with wrath.

"How many times she had taken up the phone to call me I do not know. How many times she had thought to fly back to her home with it I do not know.

"But suddenly that night all her resolution had given way. She decided to keep the Helper always for her own, and in a fury of haste began to pack up her things to leave.

"She pinned the Helper at her throat, and told the priest how it flashed with a terrible light when she made her decision. By what devilish means it got the clasp unfastened I can not guess; perhaps you will say that her fingers trembled so she did not fasten the thing securely.

"At any rate she stumbled over some article of luggage while working so feverishly, falling against the open trunk-top. The blow drove the brooch-pin deep into her throat and stabbed through the jugular vein. She was bleeding to death when she called me, one hand at her throat to try to hold back the blood that spurted out over wall and floor.

" 'Shall we let him take the diamond?' the physician asked doubtfully. 'Or isn't it something for the authorities to decide, eh?'

" 'It is his by every law and all authorities,' the priest answered. 'Boy, take the jewel and make good use of it. It may rest her soul,' he added.

"So I stepped to her side and took the Helper from her dead fingers. It seemed to me that its light changed as my fingers touched it. My stepmother, poor woman, had decided too late; the Helper had struck her aside and escaped to resume its destined errand of aid."

AT THIS point the narrator paused and swung around to the counter as if deeply moved.

"Here," he said after a pause, "bring us all some coffee; will you, waiter? This long yarn is about done; let us take a bracer before we part."

The waiter drew a long breath and moved slowly away. Both young people straightened up stiffly, surprized to find how cramped they were in the postures into which they had fallen. All four drank the coffee without haste, thoughtfully turning over the recital in their minds.

"Since that time," the older man resumed quietly, "I have gone from one stage of prosperity to the next above. Life has been a stairway, and I have had nothing to do but climb the steps.

"Of course my first act was to pawn the diamond and my next to earn the money with which to get it redeemed, and twice since then I have pledged it to get ready money. But it has urged me on until now I am securely in a place where financial worries can not be.

"A week ago I decided that the time had come to pass the Helper on. I love the old stone, as you may well believe, but I fear it too; you know now the reasons why.

"So I have been looking about for some one who seems to me to merit the Helper, and I have been wandering around all tonight, just keeping my eyes and ears open. I think I have found the place for the Helper, too; I trust you two will take it and make it the foundation-stone in your temple of success."

"Are you really sure you want to give it away to us—to part with it utterly?" the girl faltered.

"I have to give it away," the man smiled. "Would you hang on to it if you were in my shoes?"

"No, I suppose not," she answered slowly.

"But remember," he warned, putting the brooch into her yet undecided hand, "when you are in happier days and your heart tells you to release the Helper for its work do not

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hesitate. You will keep it at your peril!"

"I wouldn't want to keep it," the young man said gravely, "since it is given us so generously for such a purpose. We will abide by the compact, you have our word on that; and when we pass it on it will only be after we have told its story and exacted the same promise."

"As for pawnshops," the older man laughed, "let me recommend one that knew me in days gone by, but where I have always kept up my acquaintance."

He scribbled a name and address on the margin of a newspaper, signing the initial "J.," and they tore it off carefully. Then he accompanied the two to the door, and shook hands with them outside, wishing a God-speed. But as the door closed on the waiter's shouted, "Come back some time, all of you!" he bent down swiftly and whispered—

"Don't forget this: Tell the pawnbroker to put the pledge in the secret vault."

So they parted, the young pair going one way, their benefactor another. He walked strongly and confidently now along by the small down-town park, and hardly glanced at two men who passed, peering back at him in the graying light. They exchanged a whispered word and then wheeled about and came after him on the run.

"Just a minute, there! Just a minute, please!" they called, overtaking him.

The man stopped unwillingly, his smile gone, dismay drooping his shoulders and showing in his pallid face.

"Well, well, well!" the two police detectives shouted with mock geniality as at the chance meeting of old friends. "'Gent' Jenkins back from the pen so soon, eh? We kind o' missed that news. How long you been out, Gent?"

"About two weeks," the man whispered, cowering.

"Pulled anything yet?" his tormentors asked cheerfully.

He shook his head.

"Haven't got up around the Great White Way, eh? Not back at your old game of lifting all the jewelry off dames coming from the opera and so on?"

"I cut out all that," the man said huskily, looking around with sharp little movements of his head like a dog seeking a way to dash from a band of boys.

"Well, you used to be the finest little jewelry collector in the business," one of the detectives went on, "so just consider yourself arrested on suspicion while we frisk you to make sure. Seems to me a couple of reports we had lately sounded like your work."

They went over him quickly but thoroughly. Then the smaller of the two burst out laughing and slapped his thigh.

"Oh, what a pair of fat-heads!" he roared. "Listen, Tom. 'Big Annie' told me something last year while I was taking her up—something about Gent here. She says, Tom, that this bird always carries his stuff around in his hat. Give me that bonnet there, Gent!"

The two burrowed into the hat and exclaimed eagerly when they encountered the little pocket in the lining from which the man had taken the diamond brooch. But the pocket was empty. So they dashed the hat to the sidewalk and the man stooped and picked it up, taken with a violent trembling.

"Remember now!" they warned in parting, ugly that nothing had come of their search. "You get out of town and stay out, or up the river again for yours. And you'll go up right this time!"

Their victim leaned against the railing and watched as they strode away, still palsied with the fear of their power. Then he started off like a beaten man and got as far as the curb. There he turned and looked back.

DOWN the street the sky was brightening with its first promise of the day. Two young figures were standing at the top of the rise and watching it, their hands clasped, lost in this symbol of their future. So were their lives at the dawn; they straightened up, and stepped briskly away toward the light.

And behind them the shrinking figure of a man straightened too as he looked; for a moment the glowing fire lighted his face like the gleam of a good deed.

But then he turned his back on the sunrise and walked slowly away.

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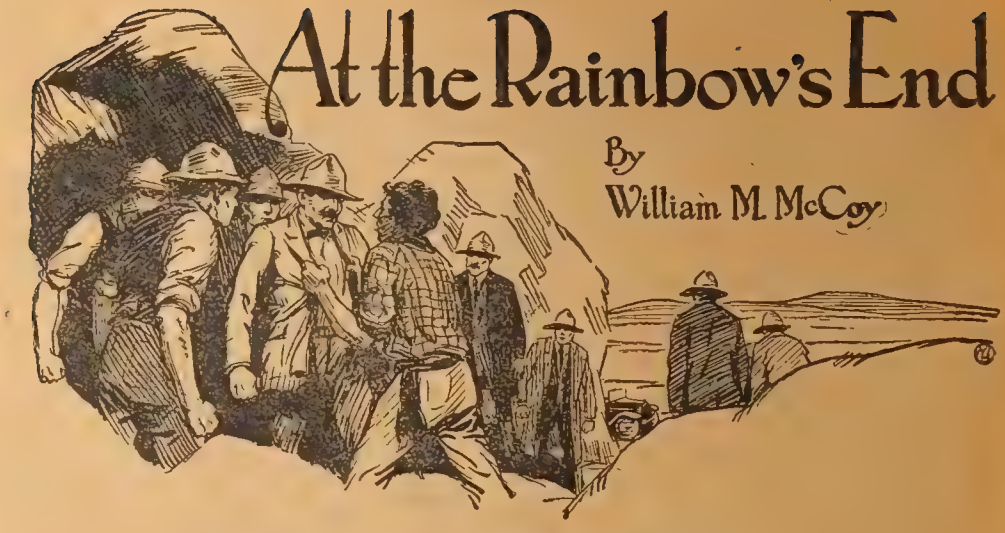
At the Rainbow's End



By
William M. McCoy

Author of "Limpin' Bob," "On the Wings of the Morning," etc.

"I MET you here to talk turkey," interrupted Charles Stone, "not to listen to your flattery, Starr." He grinned cynically. "You've got a little deal on your mind. Well, you have my terms. Are they accepted?"

David Starr did not answer at once, but turned and let his eyes wander over the wastes at their feet. From out of the east the desert swept over the brink of the world, a tideless sea of sage, surging through sublime distances as if to smother the earth.

But across the west the age-old warriors of the Sierras were flung in gleaming ranks, silent, impregnable. Serenely lifting their snow-helmeted heads into the very heavens, they looked down upon mirages drifting on shimmering waves of heat. Their magic power gone, the gray waves of sage rolled silently, impotently, against those eternal cliffs.

Along the base of this barrier of the ages a half-defined road wound through the sage, and on this two automobiles stood. One was a late model, costly and powerful, and a driver lounged behind the wheel. The other was equally powerful, but bore the scars of hard service, and was unoccupied.

A crevice-like cañon scarred the breast of one of the warriors of the range like a saber-cut, and into this the desert waves thrust themselves for a little way, just as the waves of the sea foam up on a shingle of sand in a break in barrier cliffs.

At the point of the desert's highest advance into the cañon stood the two men. A few feet to their left a ditch, plainly hand dug and carefully tended, led a tiny stream of water out of the cañon and down the slope in a wide curve.

David Starr's eyes came back from their wandering over distant summits to follow the curving descent of the ditch to where a shack of up-and-down boards stood on one edge of a sort of crazy-quilt of tiny rectangular fields. Near the house a makeshift barn leaned one way, while the chicken-house and corral leaned the other.

But even this failed to keep the place from looking spick and span, for the little fields seemed to have been laid out with square and tape-measure. Two acres of alfalfa gleamed like an emerald in that sweep of dusty gray. Various sorts of vegetables grew in plots of perhaps quarter and half acres, and the rows might have been marked off with a chalk-line, so straight were they.

To one side of the cultivated land a plot of ten or twelve acres had been cleared, and a decrepit mule and a man were laboriously pulling a drag of logs across it, leveling the ground. But the man was not driving; he was pulling beside the mule. Every few rods the strange pair stopped for a moment's rest.

A mile away, nearly straight up, was eternal snow, but on the breast of the desert the mid-morning sun was hot. When after a breathing-spell the odd team in the field strainingly forced the drag to resume its

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interrupted progress David Starr's eyes kindled and he nodded silently.

He was tall, this big chief of the Desert Power Company, and seemed taller in his closely buttoned dust-coat. His hair was gray, his face heavily lined, but his eyes were keener than those of the younger man beside him.

At last he turned back to his companion.

"I was trying to say, when you interrupted me," he began, "that you always do your work well. I might even say that you do it unusually well. And yet something as ugly as a snake crawls out and suns itself after every job you finish.

"You did a fine piece of work at Oasis—but the story about your marrying a girl there and deserting her in three months followed you out of the place. You may have had ample provocation for separating; I don't know. Men say you are a crook, and you either are one or you have a mighty hard-working bunch of enemies.

"But, Stone, I would rather do almost anything than to unjustly convict a man," he continued with friendly earnestness; "to refuse him a chance to win out because of things which look ugly, but may be only a combination of lies and misfortune. So I'm giving you this contract. Our freighting-outfits are almost through with the Big Cañon job. We'll set down the material and whatever else you need right here.

"You build this dam! That's your job. We must have it ready to catch the flood when the snow melts next Spring.

"*Adios* for a while. Remember I'm banking on you, Stone, and plow a straight furrow this time."

And David Starr shook hands with the strenuous cordiality which radiated from him and started down the steep decline toward the road while Charles Stone watched him go, his face masked by an expression of cynical amusement.

As David Starr was preparing to enter his car a tin lizard of the desert rambled into view around a sage-covered knoll, approached rapidly and stopped beside the power magnate's machine; and a thin, smooth-looking man with a professional smile stepped out, followed by a puffy individual with scraggy red whiskers.

"Good morning, Mr. Starr," began the thin man. "This must be my lucky day. Mr. Hicks and I have been trying to get in touch with you ever since we heard you were going ahead with this Scar Creek project, because——"

"Do my plans infringe any rights you may claim to this water?" cut in Starr coldly.

"Of course not," soothed the thin man. "We merely hoped that we might be of material assistance to you in our particular line. You will have considerable water to sell after it has run over your turbines, and being land-agents, I might say experts, we are willing to agree to locate any given number of particularly desirable settlers on the land in the flat below us here, settlers who will contract to buy this water you will have for sale. And we are ready to provide this market without any cost to you."

"I don't doubt it," laughed Starr. "I know you two have considered Scar Creek your own particular property for some years. You just about made your living locating settlers along the wash below it while the snow on the lower levels was melting and the flood-waters filled it bank full.

"Then you waited while those who had paid you money, all the money they had generally, watched the stream dry up—and then had to throw up their claims and move on, broken-hearted. The next year the land was open again, and you had your crop of suckers, as you call them, ready.

"It worked smoothly enough year after year until that Italian down there fooled you. He stuck.

"I've got something to say to you, Blake, and to you too, Hicks—" he turned to the whiskered fat man—"and I'll make it short. Your game is up! I'm building this dam to generate electric power.

"I will have water to sell, of course, but I promise you right now that I will refuse to sell it to any settler you locate on this land, and I'm going to advertise that thoroughly! The Desert Power Company makes no agreements with buzzards! If you want to go to court about it my lawyers will be glad to meet you there. Good morning."

And he stepped into his car, the driver let in the clutch, and the machine rolled away.

THE car had gone only a few hundred yards however when it stopped opposite the shack of up-and-down boards. While the land-agents up the road watched sourly the power magnate stepped out and walked toward the man and mule who were pantingly approaching, pulling the drag.

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Tony Vignolo waved his hand, for his breath came in such gasps that at first he could not call a greeting. Both mule and man dripped sweat, for the sun was cruel and the work heart-breaking. Rivers of perspiration streaked Tony's dusty, sunburned face, his shirt and overalls clung to his body, dripping, but his eyes smiled with real happiness.

"Meester Starr!" he panted as his visitor drew near. "Gude morning! You 'scuse me while I change from mule to Tony?"

And he laughed as he began disengaging himself from the makeshift harness. Just as he slipped the last strap the ancient mule viciously attempted to bite him, his teeth barely missing Tony's ear as the little Italian nimbly dodged.

"Quien Sabe do that 'cause he love me so mooch," he laughed again. "He got nobody else to love, so he haf to love me."

"Why do you call that mule Quien Sabe?" asked Starr, extending his hand, a peculiar smile softening his strong face.

"He lost an' I find heem one day two year ago," Tony answered, shyly taking the offered hand. "I guess somebody turn heem loose 'cause he old. I ask everybody I can find who own heem, an' dey all say, '*Quien sabe?*' So I tell heem I guess that haf be hees name, an' he come an' live with me."

"So he came and lived with you," laughed Starr. "Well, you two seem to have done quite a little since I was here last. Those vegetables are looking fine."

"Anything grow fine here, jus' geeve heem leetle water," assured the bent little Italian, hurrying along beside the tall magnate as they went over to look at the growing things. "An', Meester Starr," Tony went on, shyly patting the sleeve of Starr's dust-ulster, "I haf tell you what you do for me. You not know, Meester Starr, but you keep Tony Vignolo's heart from break; yes, an' my Tina's heart too."

David Starr looked at the work-warped little man beside him, and his keen eyes were very kind as he answered:

"I haven't done anything for you, Tony. It just happens that the building of this dam gives you a chance to sell all the truck you can raise for a year or so, for the construction-crew must be fed. If this chance means so much to you I am——"

"He mean more as I can tell you, Meester Starr," interrupted Tony, gripping the other's arm with both his calloused hands, and looking up into his face, simple, true thankfulness in his eyes. "I work in New York after I came from Italy till I can be American citizen, an' my Tina, she born there. When I make love to Tina we hear 'bout land you can haf for home, homestead you call heem, an' we theenk 'bout haf home, an' land, an' cow, an' peeg, all ours, an' all de things look like—like rainbow.

"I start out for find home, an' at last I get here, an' when my Uncle Sam geeva me deesa land I so happy I almos' bust. He Spring-time then, an' beega creek run out of de cañon. Den he get so hot Summer he burn, an' de creek—de son-of-a-gun—he hide under de sand. I haf dig all Summer to find heem.

"Other peoples down below, they move away, but Tony can't go; he got no more money. I can't send for Tina like we plan, an' not know what to do.

"So I write her letter, an' she write back an' say—

" 'You stay an' feex place, an' I work an' send you money I save for buy something to eat, an' we haf place nex' year.'

"I raise some vegetable nex' year, an' leetle alfalfa, but town seventeen mile away an' I can't sell heem. Tina say keep on, an' I keep on an' clear some more land.

"Then Tina get hurt an' ver' seeck. She no can work, an' I mus' find way for make some money for send to her, an' I theenk I haf go 'way after all my work an' all Tina's work an' lose deesa place.

"Then you come with surveyor man, an' geeva me job for help survey de dam. Then you say:

" 'Tony, I goin' haf hundred, t'ree hundred mens here for year, maybe two years. You raise vegetable, all you can, an' you can sell dem right here.'

"That keep our hearts from break, 'cause that mean I can send for my Tina nex' Fall, an' we can get married an' haf home! My Uncle Sam geeva me de land, an' you helpa me, an' I jus' work a leetle, an' we haf home! Sometimes when I no like to pull that drag some more I keeck myself an' say—

" 'Tony, you lucky son-of-a-gun, you goin' haf a farm, you goin' haf a home.' Den it pull easier for a little while."

"Tony, you can almost see those things grow," Starr exclaimed, anxious to turn the conversation, and while he inspected the thriving vegetable patches Tony stuck close beside him, battered hat in hand, enthusing

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over his growing things as a lover might over his adored one.

When Starr finally drove away Tony waved his hat in farewell, and he sang as he went back to his place in the harness beside the mule.

BLAKE and Hicks had watched Starr, during his visit to the little desert homestead, from where the magnate had left them in the road, and as the big car whirled out of sight Charles Stone came out of the cañon and joined the land-agents.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Stone began in imitation of Blake's oily manner. "Your light-hearted happiness is contagious."

And he laughed cynically.

"Did your deal go through?" demanded Hicks sourly.

"I've got the contract," Stone bowed. "Had to listen to a neat little sermon, but I got the job. If you do business with Starr you have to let him preach, but it's worth it."

"It's easy to preach the way he does, after you've got your first couple of millions or so," snapped Blake.

"I couldn't help overhearing—your deal doesn't seem to have gone through," mocked Stone.

"That's just what did happen to it—it fell through!" puffed Hicks. "I'd locate a sucker on every blasted claim below here in spite of Starr's refusal to deal, but he says he's going to warn everybody on this end of the desert that he will sell no water to our clients, and the way that blasted hound keeps his word is nothing short of outrageous."

"Why don't you buy out Tony?" queried Stone. "He's got a water right, a right to fifty inches that Starr has got to deliver. With the dam going in that right is worth real money.

"The fifty inches will be delivered every day in the year. With that and the right piece of land a man can make a neat little pile."

"Buy out Tony!" snorted Hicks. "It's ten to one Starr has told him not to sell. He wouldn't do it anyway without asking Starr. Besides he's locoed about having a home and digging in the dirt for a living!"

"Starr would sell *him* water," mused Stone suggestively. "It wouldn't be necessary to buy his place. If Tony could be—er—persuaded to assign his water right a man could take up a claim on this side of the wash and develop——"

"What will you give for Tony's water right?" cut in Blake.

"I wasn't exactly thinking of going in for ranching myself," temporized Stone, "yet I suppose I *might* level up a bit of land, and with water on it I could sell out for something. But I know any right you two may—er—secure and have for sale will probably mean a lawsuit before the title to it is cleared. Still I might be able to use it. I'll say the right is worth two hundred and fifty dollars to me."

"Make it a thousand or shut up," grunted Hicks, purpling.

"I judge you two are soon to tear yourselves from our midst and need expense money," grinned Stone. "Consequently I will treat the matter as a charity and make it five hundred. But you've got to deliver an assignment signed by Tony before at least one witness; it must be recorded, and your reassignment to me must be made in legal form, signed before a notary and also recorded.

"You can't do anything yourselves with an assignment that Tony might—er—decline to acknowledge afterward; you've got to sell it to an innocent purchaser, like me!"

And he laughed as he climbed into his car and drove away.

II

ON A day when the sun looked down upon the desert with a merciless eye Tony and Quien Sabe were struggling back and forth across the cleared plot of ground, pulling the drag which left the land just a pitiful mite more level with each trip, when the land-agents' tin lizard breezed up to the shack at the end of the field. When Blake and Hicks got out of the car Blake was carrying a clip-file with a board back, and the clamp held a number of papers in place, aided by two half-inch rubber bands snapped around both the papers and the back. Tony hailed the pair genially as they approached and disengaged himself from the harness to shake hands.

"Your place is an inspiration," began Blake, indicating with a sweep of his hand the green fields. "You have become a citizen of whom we of the desert are proud."

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"Oh, ever'thing grow fine when you geeve heem a leetle water," deprecated Tony, smiling and pleased. "Jus' a leetle work an' a leetle water; the ground, she do the rest!"

And he proudly led them toward his growing things.

"We came out from town especially to tell you about something we know will interest you, which will make your heart thankful for many things," Blake began in his best manner after everything in sight had been extravagantly admired. "Mr. Hicks and I have been making up a fund which we will send to the authorities who are aiding the war orphans of your own Italy. We have solicited the people in town and all the settlers we could reach, and they have all contributed.

"You are an American citizen now, of course, but you were born in Italy—in fact you are the only settler in this district coming from that great country—and naturally all those we asked for contributions inquired if you were subscribing. We told them that we were making up this fund as a testimonial of our high regard for you, and that while it was so far out here that we had not been able to reach you we could guarantee that you would be only too happy to sign your name and add your subscription to theirs in so worthy a cause."

Tony looked from one to the other, puzzled, crestfallen.

"You collect money for help poor babies who lose papa an' mama in war?" he queried.

"That's just the idea. I knew it would find instant response in your heart," enthused Blake.

"He touch my heart," agreed Tony. "I want to do. But I like Meester Coyote. He want de cheecken, but de cheecken in de pen an' he can't get heem. So all he can do is howl. I want to do, but I can't."

"But we—er—" considered Blake, "felt so confident that you would want to be one of us that we—er—pledged you in advance. Every settler in the district believes he is putting his contribution beside yours. You surely will subscribe at least—er—one dollar!"

"But I not got one dollar!" mourned Tony. "You an' Meester Hicks find thees place for me, an' I pay you t'ree hundred dollar. That all I have, an' I work, an' my Tina work an' send me money to live. I work till I too tired for make soup, an' sometimes I not have soup when I no catch Meester Jack Rabbit.

"Then las' winter my Tina, she get hurt ver' bad, an' I theenk the end, he come, 'cause I haf go 'way an' find work for send her money. Den Meester Starr geeve me job for help survey dam, an' I can stay an' send Tina money same time.

"Pretty soon my Uncle Sam want to borrow feefty dollar for Liberty Bond. I tell my Uncle Sam—

" 'Sure, Tony loan feefty dollar!'

"But Tina seeck so long I send her all the res' of my money an' the Liberty Bond so if she need heem she have heem. Now I haf not a dollar to geeve."

"But every one else has subscribed," protested Blake. "See, here are their names!"

And he flourished the sheaf of papers on each line of which names and dates appeared.

"I don't exactly know how I can explain to these others that——"

"But I *want* to help!" cried Tony, interrupting.

"I'll tell you how to fix it," Hicks joined. "Just as soon as work starts on the dam Tony will be on Easy Street. You loan him a dollar, Blake, and after he sells some vegetables he can pay you back."

"Why didn't I think of that before!" exclaimed Blake. "Of course I'll loan Tony the dollar, or any amount he names. I *know* him—he's good for anything he wants with me."

"You do that. You feex it so I can help," enthused Tony. "Meester Blake, I never forget; Tony Vignolo never forget his friend. It make me feel inside like the sun stop shine when I theenk I no can help de poor babies."

"We've been good friends for three years, haven't we?" laughed Blake. "What's a little thing like this between such old friends?" he went on, handing Tony a silver dollar. "Here is the subscription-paper. See, even this third sheet is full clear down to the last line.

"Sign your name and write the date after it there, below that rubber band," he added, resting the file on top of a post and handing Tony a fountain pen.

"You can give the money to Hicks; he's the treasurer of this fund," Blake smilingly continued, putting away his pen after Tony had laboriously signed his name as directed.

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Half an hour later the tin lizard stopped in an absolutely vacant expanse of desert, and Blake unclasped the clip of the file and slipped off the rubber bands. The three top sheets contained a list made up to represent signatures of most of the settlers in the district—but the third sheet was shorter than the two above it, and it ended under the half-inch rubber band spanning the lower ends of the papers and file.

Beneath this sheet and protruding below the rubber band like a continuation of the alleged subscription-list was an assignment of a water right in Scar Creek for fifty inches of water, assigned by Tony Vignolo to Andrew Blake. And exactly in the right place, acknowledging the receipt of the named considerations which made it legal—"one dollar and other valuable considerations"—Tony Vignolo's signature was written with the date following.

All was ready for Simon Hicks to sign as a witness. But instead of signing at once Hicks climbed out of the machine, crumpled the sheets of the "subscription-list," struck a match, carefully burned them and as carefully scattered the ashes.

Two days later in the distant county seat the pair of land-agents met Charles Stone by appointment, transferred the water right to him in due and legal form, received five hundred dollars in gold and drove away to seek pastures new.

III

THE Summer was still young when three giant track-laying tractors with trains of clanking trailers crawled along the road like Titanic reptiles playing "Follow the Leader." Wildly excited, Tony ran to meet them and trotted around and beside the great machines—the modern "cats" of the desert, for in the wastes the track-laying tractor of any make is a cat.

Opposite the shack of up-and-down boards "Sinful" Bill Scoggins, boss of the crew and skinner of the leading cat, stopped and profanely inquired for Tony Vignolo.

"Dave Starr said to find you," the long, lank cat-skinner continued when Tony had disclosed his identity; "that you would show us where the dam was goin' to be.".

"Meester Starr say look for Tony!" exclaimed the little Italian in delight. "He my friend, you bet!"

"Climb up here then, you blasted sphaghetti-hound," invited Sinful Bill pleasantly, "an' show us where this junk is to go."

Climbing upon the monster tractor's back, Tony stood behind Bill and held tightly to him in spite of a protesting avalanche of profanity which clouded the sun while the huge cat gripped the road with its tracks and rolled forward with its train. The dam-site reached, the three cats with their trains pulled off the road, rolling over sage as tall as a man as if it were grass.

"Now where do you s'pose that snake-lovin', lizard-faced reptile of a Stone is?" demanded Sinful Bill as he stopped. "He's s'posed to be here today with a gang to unload this junk an' start his camp."

While they waited for Stone and his crew to appear Sinful Bill and his comrades, "Freckles" Dowd and "Hungry" Tom, with their swampers meandered over Tony's place in wondering approval. At last a string of dusty automobiles appeared and a considerable crew of men scrambled out.

Instantly two things were apparent—Charles Stone knew his business, and he was a bullying driver who got results. Out of the three trains of trailers came tents, lumber, tools, cooking-utensils, crates of china, all the duffel of a large and fairly permanent camp. While Tony looked on in wonder a little city of tents grew on the flat across the wash from his own place and carpenters were sawing and hammering, putting up cook-house, tool-house, and office shack.

"Look here, I thought you promised to have some vegetables ready for me!"

And Tony came out of his trance to find Stone yelling at him.

"Dey ready; I bring dem, Meester Stone," he called back.

As the days and weeks passed Tony worked in a fever of delight. The great cats crawled up to where the dam was to be, bringing machinery, supplies, everything; and the tent-city on the flat grew and grew, for the dust-covered automobiles came back again and again to disgorge loads of men who were put to work before they had had a chance to turn around more than once.

The mountains rumbled back the thunder of exploding dynamite, and the blows of blacksmiths' hammers shaping steel rang bell-like in the desert air. And Tony

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worked as he had never worked before, because the cooks at the camp demanded vegetables and more vegetables.

When he had planted the acreage David Starr had advised, it had seemed impossible to Tony that he could ever sell so much. Now he feared that he did not have enough.

Caring for all his growing things looked impossible in the gray half-light of morning when he went to work, but each day saw that day's work done, for Tony was working with a song in his heart.

He could soon send for Tina, secure in the knowledge that his farm, their home, would provide them with a living. Their years of working, of waiting, would be crowned with happiness. At last the long trail was winding.

Then one day as Sinful Bill led his strange procession across a strip of desert where the road danced in the heat he leaned from his cab and swore softly, shut off his engine and swung down to the ground. Beside the road was a two-wheeled cart to which were hitched a span of burros—only one burro lay dead in the harness and the other stood with drooping head, nearly dead from weariness and thirst, gaunt with hunger, shackled by the harness to its dead comrade.

The cart was empty. Bill examined footprints leading into the greasewood, wonderingly followed the trail a few steps and halted. At his feet, her head in a tiny patch of shade, lay a young woman.

A less experienced man might have thought her asleep, but Bill knew she was dead—had died of hunger and thirst. Gently he examined a bundle she clasped in her arms, and then stepped back, startled—for the bundle was a baby a few months old, and the baby was alive! Evidently the mother had been dead only a few hours.

Sinful Bill picked up the baby, and it began to wail pitifully just as Freckles and Hungry Tom joined him. The three desert men looked at each other silently; then Sinful called to his swamper to bring a piece of canvas.

With the true reverence of the men of the great spaces who walk hand in hand with tragedy they wrapped the still form of the young mother in the canvas and placed it in one of the trailers. While Sinful Bill tried to give the baby water the others unharnessed the living burro, let it drink a little from a hat into which a canteen was emptied and then lifted the animal into a trailer loaded with sacks of cement. Then with the baby in his arms Sinful Bill started on.

When the cats drew abreast of the shack of up-and-down boards they stopped, and Tony came hurrying in answer to Bill's shout.

"What you got, Meester Seenful Bill?" he asked, running up. "Ooh! He is a baby! Where you find heem? What hees name?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Bill answered soberly. "We——"

"That no name for baby," protested Tony. "He mule's name!"

But in another instant he perceived Bill's grave mood, and his own changed in a flash.

"What happen? Where is baby's mama an' papa?" he asked as Bill led the way to the trailer, and tears were in his eyes when he looked away from the still face under the canvas.

"I can't take the kid to the camp. Will you keep him till we can do something?" Sinful Bill asked. "I'll bring you over some condensed milk an' sech, an' round you up a bottle for him next trip," and in answer Tony held out his arms for the baby.

"How about her?" Bill inclined his head. "I don't like to take her into that Bohunk camp."

"Bring her in my house," Tony invited, wiping his eyes and jouncing the baby, seeking to quiet its wailing.

Half an hour later Sinful Bill found Stone, and after telling what he had found asked Stone as a man well acquainted on the desert to look at the young mother and see if he could identify her. Stone strode down to Tony's, lifted the canvas and looked at the face, still girlish in spite of suffering and the tortures of thirst, and shook his head.

"I never saw her before," he said.

Bill followed him outside.

"You'll have one of the carpenters make her a coffin?" he asked.

"Why should I?" bristled Stone. "I'm too busy; every man I've got has all he can do. Besides I pay them to work for me. Bury her in that canvas; that's——"

But he stopped, for Sinful Bill, eyes blazing, gripped his shoulder, spun him around, and began saying things—things which must have made the Recording Angel drop the receiver for a moment. But if he picked it up again his face must have changed while he listened to old Sinful Bill, and he probably rubbed his chin while he called an assistant

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and inquired the number of volumes of debit journals already filled with Bill's record.

But when Bill finished it would be easy to imagine a benign and just Recording Angel observing:

"Between nine and ten thousand, you say? Well, I think we will burn those up and start a new set."

However that may be, two carpenters on Stone's time immediately set to work and fashioned a decent coffin out of Stone's lumber. And next morning Tony, Bill, Hungry Tom and Freckles bore that coffin to a sheltered nook on Tony's homestead, and old Sinful Bill reverently conducted a burial service just as well as he knew how.

WHILE the work went on and the cats clawed their way from the railroad to the dam Bill and his comrades and David Starr hunted far and near for clues which might lead to the identification of the young mother who was no more, and tried to discover the relatives of the baby—but all the time Tony cared for the wee boy. David Starr and the cat-skinners marveled—how he managed to do two men's work and look after the infant at the same time seemed a miracle—but Tony sang as he worked in his fields or shack and would not listen to their proposal to take the baby to an orphanage.

On a day when Starr drove over to inspect the work on the dam he brought Tony his mail. And when he was ready to return to town he stopped in to see Tony and the baby as was his friendly custom, and the little Italian's troubled face brought quick sympathy into the great builder's eyes.

"Bad news, Tony?" he asked. "Anything I can do?"

"The letter you bring me was from Tina, an' jus' for a leetle it seem like the sun, he die!" Tony began. "See, here is her letter."

And he held up the sheets, closely written in Italian, and David Starr saw that they had been splashed with tears while they were being penned.

"I do not know jus' how to say it, Meester Starr," Tony resumed. "I tol' you once Tina hurt ver' bad. It was her back, an' de doctor find it was inside too. She been ver' seeck again, but was goin' to come to me when doctor, he tell her she will be well in some way, but she better not get married. Tina an' me, we not talk 'bout it, but we know when we theenk 'bout a home we both theenk 'bout leetle ones to love an' play an' laff.

"So after de doctor talk to Tina she theenk she got no right to marry me. What you theenk of that! Jus' as if I can be happy an' have home without Tina!"

The usually stern face of the man whom men called an empire-builder was very tender as he put a hand on Tony's toil-bent shoulder.

"You'll send for her at once, Tony?" he asked.

"I send her de money t'ree week ago," Tony answered, looking up, simple faith and earnestness reflected in his face. "I haf a letter ready—will you mail heem, Meester Starr?"

"Of course I will," Starr agreed. "And, Tony," he went on, "some of my men are going to settle below the dam and there will be several families at the power-house, so you'll soon have quite a little community here. You won't have much market, however, after the construction-crew is through.

"But one of our big trucks will come in every week with supplies for the power-house, and as we have nothing for it to carry back to the railroad we'll make you a hauling rate which will enable you to ship your potatoes and onions and such produce."

"Meester Starr!" Tony exclaimed, gripping the magnate's arm. "I—I—I don' know what to say! Sometime when I too tired for make soup the sun, he turn black an' den I keeck myself an' I say:

" 'Tony, you lucky son-of-a-gun! All you got do is leetle work, an' your Uncle Sam, an' Meester Starr, dey feex it so you an' Tina haf home!' "

"I tell you what we'll do, Tony," laughed Starr. "When Tina comes I'll bring her out in my car and I'll bring Judge Davis along so that he can marry you."

"Tony, keeck yourself to see if you awake!" capered Tony. "Meester Starr, I so happy I feel like—like— I can't say it—it no use— All de things look like—like rainbow! An' all I did was work a leetle—an' Tina work—an' we goin' haf home!"

THE three cats came in early on the afternoon that Tina was expected—and in one lumbering trailer rode a mildly wondering cow and two lazily grunting pigs, stock Tony had bought from a ranchman many miles to the south.

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When Sinful Bill stopped to unload the animals Tony ran out to the road, almost incoherent with excitement and happiness.

"He come out jus' like we plan," Tony enthused when the cow and pigs had been placed in the quarters prepared for them; "jus' like we theenk 'bout home, with land an' cow an' peegs when my Tina an' me, we see—when all things look like rainbow!"

Leaving Tony enthusing over his new possessions while he awaited the arrival of his Tina, the three cat-skinners delivered their freight and then wandered up to the dam. The excavation was down to bedrock, the wooden forms were in place for the pouring of the foundation, and men were busy completing the installation of the twisted bars of reenforcing steel. Imprisoned in a flume, the little stream was led over the first staging.

Turning back from the dam, Sinful Bill and his two companions stopped suddenly at Tony's ditch. It was dry! The water was running down another ditch to the flat below the camp on the opposite side of the wash.

"Hey! Stone!" yelled Sinful Bill as he sighted the contractor a moment later. "What does this mean? What right have you got to shut off Tony's water?"

"That water is not his," Stone snapped. "It's mine. I bought that water right before we started work on the dam and located that flat down there. I wasn't ready to use the water so I let Tony have the benefit of it. I'm flooding the flat now, and then I'm going to plow out the brush."

"You bought Tony's water right!" exploded Bill. "Who'd you buy it from?"

"That's none of your business," Stone replied curtly and would have turned away, but Bill gripped his arms and held him.

The other cat-skinners and their swampers crowded close, while blacksmiths and workmen of all sorts came running to gather back of Stone.

"None of my business, hey! It's a cinch you didn't buy it from Tony—an' I'll jest make it my business. Now——"

But just then Tony dashed into the midst of the group.

"Meester Seenful! Meester Hungry! Meester Freckles!" he was shouting. "What you t'ink? I'm a son-of-a-gun, but dat baby haf a teeth!"

The men of the construction crew laughed, and the tension relaxed for a moment. Sensing trouble, Tony looked around wonderingly and suddenly he realized that his ditch was dry.

"De water!" he cried, beside himself. "De water! He not run down-hill some more!"

"I let you use the water all Summer, Tony," Stone began with cool insolence, "but I need it now, so I've turned it into my ditch."

"But he is *my* water!" Tony frantically protested, throwing himself upon Stone, gripping his arms, patting his shoulders. "You not understand. He is my water!"

"It was your water until you sold the right," insisted Stone. "You can't sell a thing and keep it too."

"But I not sell!" denied Tony.

"Well, I bought it from Andrew Blake and he had a full assignment from you, signed by you before a witness. I——"

"I not sign paper! It is steal!" panted Tony, leaping at Stone, fighting like a cornered wildcat.

For a few moments the powerful contractor, fifty pounds heavier than his antagonist, gave ground before Tony's furious attack; then, seizing the opening he was waiting for, he pinioned the little homesteader's arms at his sides and held him helpless.

"So this is my reward for being such a good friend to you all Summer!" Stone sneered. "I've bought your vegetables, paid you cash, let you use the water free—and you call me a thief!

"How was I to know anything about your deal with Blake? I bought this water from him after the transfer from you to him had been recorded down at the county seat. I bought it in good faith, and I have to stand on my rights because I have already agreed to deliver the water to another man.

"So you see I can't do anything about it—I'm helpless," he ended, releasing his grip on Tony's arms.

"But, Meester Stone, you not take my water—take my home! I not sign paper to sell. Once I sign where I say I geeve money to baby who got no papa an' mama—I not sign to sell! There is mistake—you feex heem!"

The work-worn little homesteader pleaded frantically, his supplicating hands patting the contractor's arms, shoulders, even his cheeks; but Stone remained adamant. When at last hope was gone and Tony turned away he seemed to have aged a century.

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"An' Tina is coming today!" he murmured brokenly.

When Tony had cast pride, everything, to the four winds while he begged for his home Bill had called Hungry and Freckles aside and given rapid directions. And then as the bent little man turned away with his heart-broken murmur old Sinful erupted with an awfulness that was awe inspiring, solemn.

Stone tried to elude him, but the giant cat-skinner caught his man, held him at arm's length and poured out a stream of accusation and invective that seared even Stone. And while the two powerful men stood face to face, cursing each other, the construction-crew gathered around, too eager for the first blow to be struck to notice two of the cats bumping themselves about and backing as close to the dam as they could get while the eager swampers worked frenziedly with chains. Bill faced the dam and held Stone so that he could not see it.

"You're goin' to hand that water right back to Tony, an' you're going to do it now!" old Sinful announced with finality when the right time had come as he released Stone.

"I am, am I!" scoffed Stone. "I'll see you an' all your kind in——"

"You're a right sassy snake, ain't you?" interrupted Bill. "You're so slimy you think you're slick. Jes' look behind you, little one!"

Stone looked behind him, started to speak, and then stood as if he had turned to rock. Heavy chains had been hooked into the network of reenforcing steel by the frantically working swampers, and these chains were coupled to the draw-bars of the two huge cats. Their engines purring, the cats were poised, ready, while the two cat-skinners, their faces granite, their eyes alert, waited Sinful Bill's signal.

"Pass over that water right," demanded Bill, "or you're plumb ruined. Them cats will tear out in jest one minute what it's taken you all Summer to build."

"No transfer obtained this way is legal; it will not stand in—" Stone began defiantly; but Bill lifted his hand, the purring rumble of the cats became a throbbing roar, the clutches were let in, the great nineties gripped the ground, then rolled forward slowly, relentlessly as time.

"Now you'll take your medicine, you, blasted buzzard!" cursed Bill. "I'll 'tend to you——"

"What is the trouble, Bill?" a shout interrupted just as the cats took up the last atom of slack in the chains.

The monsters stopped, and every man there turned to find David Starr facing them with Judge Davis behind them. In the excitement no one had seen the magnate's car stop in front of Tony's shack and then move on to the dam-site.

"This freckle-livered, snake-hearted, buzzard-eating, coyote-brained son of Bee-ell-zee-bub is tryin' to steal Tony's water right—an' he ain't goin' to git away with it!"

"No, of course he is not," promptly agreed Starr, and then proceeded to get the story of what had happened just before he arrived.

"Stone," he began when he had the facts, and Stone met the older man's eyes with insolent defiance, "some things have happened lately that we had to look up—and without hunting for it we struck your trail. The girl who died out there in the desert—the girl for whom Bill forced you to make a coffin—the girl you said you had never seen before—was your wife!

"Yes, the wife you married in Oasis and then cast aside. We have her identified beyond a doubt.

"We know that you knew that she was sick—we know that after she sold everything she owned in order to keep herself and your child from starving she attempted in desperation to come to you to beg you to provide for the child. You were notified that she was on the way with the baby.

"The sheriff of Cactus County tried to prevent her starting on such a journey with only two burros and a cart, but she eluded him. Then he notified you.

"We know you got the letter; it was registered—you knew that your wife and baby were somewhere between here and Oasis—alone in that desert. You did nothing—you did less than that—you denied her there in Tony's shack—Tony has been caring for your baby.

"Yesterday we accidentally discovered the transfer of this water right.

"Judge Davis has three papers for you to sign. One reconveys Tony's water right back to him. The second renounces all your claims to the child in favor of Tony, who wants him. The third transfers your

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interest in this contract to me as trustee for the boy. Sign them now."

STONE moistened his lips as Judge Davis produced the documents and seemed about to speak when Bill interrupted.

"Lemme 'ten' to him, Dave!" old Sinful pleaded. "Lemme 'ten' to him!

"Lemme hook a couple o' chains around him an' pull the blasted son o' —— to pieces with the cats!" Bill panted—and when the judge produced a fountain pen Stone signed on the line indicated.

"It isn't legal—it won't stand," he defied weakly.

"If these matters are ever brought into a desert court the trail will not be finished in the courtroom," coolly announced the judge, placing the documents in a long envelope.

"I gave you your chance, Stone," Starr began again. "I've made it the rule of my life to build on men—but you and I do not travel the same road. You heard Bill—well, in ten minutes it will be open season on snakes. It's time for you to go, and keep on going."

The throng of workmen choking the mouth of the little cañon were watching Stone driving furiously northward when David Starr turned in response to a timid touch upon his arm.

"Meester Starr, de water, he run downhill some more?" pleaded Tony, his face tragic.

"It will; you needn't worry about that," and the sun rose again in Tony's eyes.

"Oh, Meester Starr, I—I——"

"Holy Jee-rusalem!" exclaimed Starr, interrupting. "I forgot all about Tina! She's in your house, Tony. We left her there as we came by, and——"

But Tony was going down the road as if borne upon wings.

"Tina!" he called as he dashed up to the house. "Tina!"

And a shy woman, young but marked by suffering and toil, came timidly to meet him, her eyes downcast, her work-roughened hands nervously clasping and unclasping.

"Tina! My Tina!"

Tony choked as he swept her into his arms, kissed her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, her hair, and patted her face while he whispered that she was beautiful—and his own.

At first she clung to him sobbing; then she held herself away a little, the light in her eyes transforming her face as she looked at him.

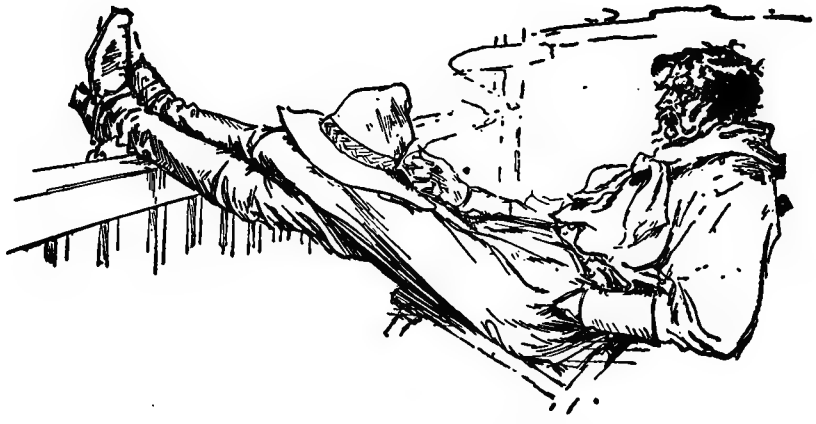
"Tina, I haf keeck myself!" enthused Tony. "I haf keeck myself to see if I awake! You work an' I work a leetle when I not too lazy—an' look what happen to us! We haf home! We haf farm of our own! Oh, Tina, Tina! Jus' a leetle work make me so much happiness I goin' bust!"

"But you—you have a baby!" she faltered at last.

"Ooh! I not tell you 'bout heem—I keep heem for de beeg surprize!" beamed Tony.

"But—but whose—whose baby is he?" she asked hesitantly.

"Whose baby! Ha-ha!" laughed Tony. "That is de beeg surprize I keep for day when we get married. He is *our* baby!"



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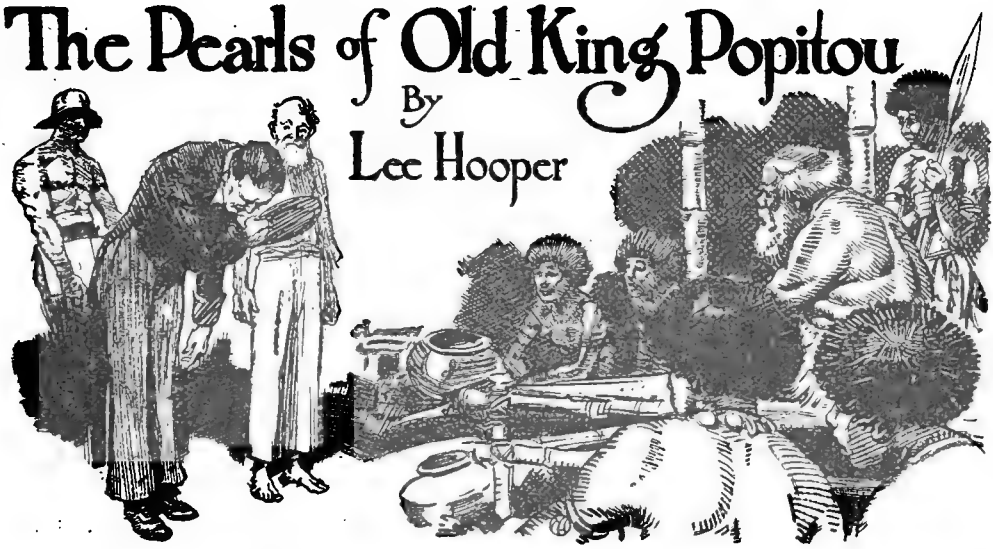
The Pearls of Old King Popitou

By Lee Hooper



BIG, two-fisted Tom Hanley told me this yarn in the lobby of the Pacific Hotel, far uptown from his old haunts along the waterside. I hadn't seen him for nearly two years, at which time he had just earned his mate's license and secured a berth on the *African Belle*. His vessel was not in port, it being my business to know such matters, so I very naturally showed surprize at finding him in town.

"I'm cured o' the sea," he said, shaking his head mournfully.

And this is the story he told me:

OLD "Square-Face Pete," that's been kicked off every island in the South Seas, one time or another, was mixed up in it. You don't know him of course, but a good bit farther south he's got a large and regretful acquaintance. He's not such an old man, either, but the sun an' wind, an' sleepin' here an' there, as you might say, has sort o' dried him out an' shriveled him up. Licker helped some too, I guess.

'Twas down Towana way I run across him again, sprawled against a sickly-lookin' palm tree in front of Greek Charlie's place. His back was rubbin' against the tree an' his toes wigglin' in the hot sand just outside the little patch of shade. First thing he wanted to know, of course, was: Did I have any gin? Not even interested, you see, in how I happen to drop in there or anything like that, his mind runnin' on licker as usual.

He was fair-to-middlin' drunk then, which was about as drunk as he ever got. Quantity an' quality was his motto, but if the quantity was there the other didn't matter. That old beach-comber is the original human sponge. I steered him into the Greek's an' after makin' myself acquainted by orderin' a round I asked Charlie how the old reptile managed to get licker to keep normal on. Square-Face, he says, has been sweepin' out the shop of a mornin' an' gettin' his board an' a drink now an' then in exchange for his labors. We had another drink an' I led old Pete outside.

"What's doin' in Towana?" I says.

"Same old island," says Square-Face. "The Greek gettin' richer an' the rest of us poorer all the time. Company down below gettin' out copra, an' some Chinks on the other side divin' for pearls an' scatterin' their stinkin' shells all over creation."

"Gettin' any pearls?" I asks him, figurin' if they was I could find a way to separate 'em from 'em.

"Nothin' much but seed, I reckon," says Pete. "They ain't no way o' tellin' though. Them Chinks is mighty close-mouthed. They ain't got no more idea o' talkin' about their business than you have of buyin' a drink."

I didn't pay no attention to that.

"Don't they have to divvy with the

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governor or king, or whoever it is that runs this one-cylinder island?" I asks him, givin' him a clout on the head to wake him up.

"Mebby so," says the old bald-headed cuss. "Just prance up to the king's palace an' see what you can find out."

"Where's the palace?" I asks.

"I dunno for sure," says Pete. "Day before yesterday it was up there on the hill where you see them cocobolo trees, but it may have been moved since then. Whenever the king ain't got nothin' else on hand, which is most o' the time, he moves the palace to another place. Leastways his niggers does. He don't never do none o' the work hisself. King Popitou never turned his hand in his life. Long live the king!" he says.

"King Popitou?" I says. "Seems to me I've heard o' him. Kind of a skinny old cannibal, ain't he?"

"Oh, no," says Pete. "They's plenty of him, such as it is. He ain't the style to do a disappearin' act right before your eyes. He weighs over four hundred."

"What kind of an old goat is he?" I asks him.

"Pretty fair, for a king. He ain't got but five or six wives. He don't stay drunk no longer than his gin lasts, which is the best I can say for him. Last month he didn't draw a sober breath, but this month he ain't drawed nothin' else. That's what made me suggest that you go up to see him.

"I don't know what else he'd do, but he'd take you apart to see the works anyway. When he ain't full o' licker he's a holy terror, an' he must be plumb pizen by this time. I'd bet a drink, if I had it, that he ain't got the same wives he had last week, an' I'd bet another drink——"

"If you had two," I says.

"——if I had two," he goes on, "that they ain't enough left o' the first batch to make one good nigger skin out o' the whole bilin' of em!"

"Where does he get his licker?" I asks him.

"I hear he swaps pearls for it with the ships' officers, but I never see him do it," says the old reprobate. "Charlie's got the only licker on the island, but he dassen't sell it to the natives, whether they're kings or queens or just plain native. He did it once, an' the Dutch Commissioner heard about it an' fined him two hundred pounds."

"That's enough about ships an' palaces. By the way, where's yourn?" I says.

"My what?" he says.

"Your palace," I says.

"Right this way, your Highness," says Pete, steppin' away from the tree an' headin' down the beach a ways. "I don't know if my grand high chamberlain has swep' up this mornin', but you know how dreadful our servants is these days."

I give him a kick to hurry him along, an' pretty soon we come to a galvanized-iron shack with a leaky, thatched roof, an' that was all there was to it. No bed nor nothin'; just the four hot walls an' packed sand for a floor.

"Fine!" I says. "You must be gettin' prosperous lately. You stay here," I says, "until I come back for you."

I GETS out o' there an' goes back past the Greek's place an' on down to the dock, if you can call it that. Well back under the floorin', among the rotten piles, is a ship's boat. I knowed it was there, because I left it there before daybreak that mornin' when I rowed in from the ship I stole it off. Not exactly stealin', either, because they owed me three weeks' wages.

A dark night it was when I left 'em, but not too black for me to see the island off our quarter. This was before I got my mate's license; I was only a seaman then. "Leftie Bill," my best pal aboard, that had a grouch against the captain, helped me away as the ship crawled past the darker shadow that was the island. He lowered away my slop chest an' a couple o' sizable boxes that I'd brought aboard, an' afterward come near to slidin' down hisself, but they owed him too much wages, so he stuck on. I didn't want him with me, nohow.

The things was just as I'd left 'em, which was what I'd come to see, so I ambles along toward the end of the island to the copra company's offices. A clerk answers my hail, an' I found out from him that the *Anita*, a schooner they had under charter, was due to sail the next mornin' at nine.

'Twas the only boat in the harbor an' no other due for a fortnight, so I decided to sail with her. She was bound for Frisco, which suited me very well, but any other place would have done.

I stopped at the dock on my way back

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an' got a couple o' quarts o' gin from my chest to take along with me. That was all the gin I had in my chest, but I had a dozen bottles in a small box an' three dozen in a larger one. All full quarts, too, five to the gallon, which is licker pirates' idea of what you ought to get when you pay for quarts.

I kicked old Square-Face awake an' handed him both bottles of the stuff, an' then had to kick him again to persuade him he wasn't still dreamin'.

"Take this gin," I says, "up to King Popitou."

I thought old Pete was goin' to cry before I could finish what I had to say.

"Give him one quart," I says, "an' keep the other for yourself, an' you an' the king sit down an' have a drink-fest."

"With two quarts?" says Pete, in a shrill voice. "Why, that old cannibal will swallow his, bottle an' all, an' then murder me for what's left in mine," he says.

"Good!" I says. "An' just before he murders you plumb dead, you tell him you know where there's three dozen more just like 'em."

"Look here!" says Pete. "It ain't possible you're goin' to give that kinky-haired heathen three dozen quarts o' gin. Ain't you got no heart a-tall?" he weeps.

"Get out o' here," I says, givin' him a kick, "an' do what I tell you. Afterwards there'll be plenty for me an' you."

He starts out for the palace, still wailin' about givin' all that perfectly good licker to a snaggle-toothed pirate, so I calls after him:

"An' mind you don't drink any of it on the way," I says. "If you do I'll take the hide off you an' hang it up to dry!"

In about half an hour, just as I expected, here comes Square-Face an' King Popitou, stumblin' down the hill arm in arm, with the whole court strung out behind 'em. There must have been two or three hundred of 'em, countin' women an' children. I steps to the doorway, with my arms folded, an' when they gets about fifty feet away I says—

"Who comes here?" as solemn as I could make it.

"Why, me an' the king," says Square-Face, surprized. "Who'd you expect?"

"Tell King Popitou that I haven't consented to grant him no audience!" I says sternly.

"Tell him yourself," says old Pete. "Besides, he heard you good as I did. Didn't you, king?"

"You got gin?" asks old Popitou, payin' no attention to the talk.

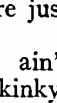
"A few," I admits.

"I plenty buy," says the king.

"Nothin' doin'!" I says. "I don't trade that way. Tonight I will come to the palace in state, an' we will make talk," I says.

He kicks like a steer at that, but he can't help hisself, an' after he's edged up close enough to see they ain't no licker in Pete's shack he turns about an' the whole party makes up the hill again.

Half a dozen of his faithful subjects is a-pushin' him from the rear an' three or four is pullin' him along by the arms, so pretty soon they tops the rise an' disappears. Pete stays with me, I bein' the party that had the licker. I could see Pete was puzzled as much as the king, but he knew I wouldn't tell him where the gin was, so he saved his breath.



NIGHT come along at last, an' I begun to get ready for the show. First thing I did was to put on the most outlandish rig ever seen in the islands. I even had old Popitou beat, when it comes to that. He didn't wear much of anything but a few brass rings around his wrists an' ankles, an' a once-white collar three inches too small around his fat neck. A wonder it didn't choke him.

My costume was more elaborate, anyhow. It was a purple satin minstrel suit that I'd won from a showman in Manila one night just before their troupe was leavin' the Philippines. The coat had swallowtails hangin' 'most to the ground, an' the pants belled out at the bottom like a sailor's britches. The hat that went with the costume was the same shiny purple satin—one of the kind that folds up like an accordion. When I got into that outfit I looked like glad tidin's.

What with the gin I meant to stuff him with, an' that costume to blind him with, it would be mighty hard luck if I couldn't out-trade the king for a few pearls. I knew he had 'em, all right.

Square-Face had gone out an' picked up a stray Kanaka to help us with the heavy work, which was totin' the big gin-box up the hill, so pretty soon we started out. It wasn't far to the palace, an' when

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we hove in sight I made old Pete walk behind me, holdin' up my coat-tails, an' the Kanaka behind him, balancin' the heavy case on his woolly head. If we didn't make an imposin' procession, we made a curious one, an' we didn't lack an audience.

The whole kingdom turned out to welcome us, savin' only the king an' maybe a personal attendant or so. They was back in the rear o' the main hut, which was the palace, his nibs settin' on a little raised platform behind a' empty packin' case, for all the world like the grand high potentate of the loyal order of somethin' or other.

I made old Square-Face swing to my coat until we got up close to the king. My costume made a hit with Popitou, I could see that. His eyes, that most generally set back in his head like a pig's, was poppin' out of his greasy face till you could have raked 'em off with a stick.

I made signs to the Kanaka to bring the case o' gin forward an' set it down in front of the king's box an' then I motioned for him to remove the top. I took out a quart an' passed it over, an' I never see a man go after licker the way the king did. He broke the neck off with a stone an' stuck the jagged end in his mouth. When he eased off to catch his breath, half the gin was gone, an' one more gurgle did the business for that bottle. When he reached out his dirty paw for another one I shook my head.

"Nothin' stirrin'!" I says. "How much for the lot?"

"You likum pearls?" asks the old heathen.

"I likum money," I says, knowin' he didn't have any.

"Look see!" says his nibs, reachin' inside his box that was open on his side. He pulls out a little canvas bag, tied mighty careful with a bit o' red cord, an' after fumblin' with the knots a while he manages to open it. One of his niggers sprinkles a little sand on top o' the box, an' old Popitou rolls his wealth out in a little heap before my eyes.

I'd heard that he had some sizable pearls, but nobody ever told me what they looked like. I reckon they didn't know how to, no more than I know how to tell you. Most of 'em was just pearls, big enough to be right valuable an' good enough for anybody, but there were six of 'em—man, man! My mouth watered for 'em! The palest pink, they were, with a luster like nothin' on land or sea. Even when they were still, there on that cheap pine box, the lights in 'em moved an' waved, an' you might have sworn they was alive.

No use to go into our dickerin's an' quarrelin's. Tradin' with natives is always like that. In the course of 'em, though, I helped proceedin's along with another quart or two, an' the old pirate finally come to my terms, which was the whole bag.

I wouldn't agree to let him keep even a little one out of the lot, knowin' how bad he wanted my gin, an' that if I kept on bargainin' I could get 'em all before I quit. After the deal was made I stayed just long enough to take a drink with the old devil, then I walked out an' down the hill an' out of his life, you might say.

Square-Face met me at his shack, an' I gave him the other box with a dozen quarts in it for helpin' me make the trade. There I left him, happy with his licker—enough to make even him pretty drunk—an' went on to the copra company's offices where they had a cot for me to sleep on that night. Next mornin' I went aboard the *Anita* as a passenger, an' promptly at nine we set sail for Frisco.

If I hadn't been so foolish as to open my bag o' pearls while I was still on the island, not knowin' who might be spyin' on me, so, thinkin' to feast my eyes a little, I goes to my cabin *pronto* an' hauls her out of my pocket. I set the little bag on the seat under the port-hole an' opens her up. Just as I peeps inside, the captain of the schooner pokes his face in the door an' follows his nose inside the cabin.

He was laughin' like a hyena, an' what surprized me was that he was laughin' at me.

"The same old bag," he says, "tied with the same old piece o' red cord, an' the same old pebbles an' bits o' shell where you was expectin' to find pearls."

"What you talkin' about?" I says.

"Oh, don't mind me!" he says. "I'm used to it! You're about the tenth chuckle-headed sailorman that's come aboard me with a canvas bag full o' pearls that he bought from old Popitou, only to learn that the old skate had switched bags on him."

Then he commenced laughin' again.

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"How does he do it?" I asks.

"Same old way," says the captain. "He ain't got no originality an' don't seem to need any. His one stale trick is good enough. Did he put the bag down on his knee an' hug it an' carry on over it just before he handed it over?"

"He did," I says.

"Always does," he says. "That's when one of his niggers, that's been hid in the box, takes the bag out of his hands an' gives him another with the same red cord on it, an' then slides out of a hole in the wall back o' the king's seat. Too many niggers around for you to be watchin' 'em all, so you don't see him prob'ly, an' don't think nothin' of it if you do."

I cussed that old reprobate until his ears must ha' burned, an' the captain laughed hisself sick.

"Make yourself comfortable," he says at last. "I won't charge nothin' for the passage to Frisco, knowin' you're most prob'ly broke. All Popitou's customers are, an' I haul the victims away free o' charge. It's got to be a habit with me, an' the company don't need the money anyhow."

With that he walks off, still laughin', an' we sails on for ten thousand years or so until at last we gets to Frisco, an' here I am. No more sea for me!

BIG Tom Hanley sighed heavily as he finished his yarn. I passed him a cigar and, getting up from the comfortable chair I had been occupying, began to pull on my gloves, preparatory to leaving him to his sad thoughts.

"That's too bad, Tom," I sympathized. "I would have liked to see those pink pearls," I added.

"Two of 'em I've sold," said Tom, "but the other four I've got in a safe-deposit box, an'——"

"But you said—" I began, with wide-open eyes.

"Oh, you're thinkin' about what the captain said," Tom interrupted. "Why I got the pearls all right, of course. I'd heard all about old Popitou an' the way he'd been cheatin' people for years, an' I made my preparations beforehand. I even knew old Square-Face was on Towana an' counted on his help.

"You see," he continued, "when I went to call on King Popitou I didn't wear but one sock. Pete had the other one, full o' beach sand, an' was waitin' at that back door when the nigger came out with the real bag. A sock full o' sand don't make no noise on a dinge's skull, but it's a fine little sleep-persuader."

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Wulfhere

A Five-Part Story Part II

By
A. B. Higginson

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

IT WAS Winter in the year of our Lord 691. Within a hut in England sat an old hermit and two mighty men clad in armor and brown Saxon garb. The hermit told this tale:

My name is Edbert. I was born a member of the Northfolk, and of these people my father was king. But when I was a lad my stepbrother Tytla poisoned my father and plotted to poison me also, for he wanted to be king. So I fled, taking with me my sister Cyneswithe.

Hot on our track came Tytla's men, and they had almost overtaken us when we drew near the wall of another town. As we were about to be slain there came a clanging at the gate and out marched a company of soldiers. Behind them stalked the hugest, fiercest man ever I laid eyes on. It was Penda the Terrible. Then I knew that it was he who, an outcast lad, had wandered by my father's house when I was a boy, and I had given him to eat and drink. Forthwith I called this to his mind, and remembering he saved me and my sister.

So came Cyneswithe and I to Penda's town.

Cyneswithe Penda took to wife, and I in time became his priest and councilor, for I was wiser than any man of his kingdom and I ministered to his ambition.

Would he go up against Cynegils of Wessex?

"Go up, King, go up and prosper," said I. "For surely thou art champion of the holy gods, and they go with thee."

He went and prospered, and I became a prophet in his eyes.

Now Penda had two sons, and whenever another was born to one of his wives it was put to death.

"Many a king is slain by his false sons," he said. "What could I do against a score or more?"

But when Cyneswithe bore him a son, that son was not slain. For at the same time a son was born dead to me and I changed the one for the other, so that my child was buried as Penda's and Penda's grew up as mine. None knew this but Cyneswithe and Penda's mother and I.

The lad was named Wulfhere. He waxed strong.

Now when Wulfhere was scarce grown a man the king called a tournament wherein all could show their strength and skill, and at this tournament was a great man with a bearskin hanging over his shoulder. He it was who, when all others failed, pulled from the great oaken block the ax that Penda himself drave there. He had a bear, and this bear fought with three Dane dogs and killed them.

At this certain men grew wroth and plotted to waylay the stranger and kill him, for they were friends of Immin, who owned the dogs. But Wulfhere, in whom a great love for the valiant stranger had sprung up, heard them, and he was there when they fell upon the stranger by a lonely pass, and he and the stranger killed these men.

"Now come with me, lad, and be my brother," said the stranger. "I am king of a strange people in the land of Hwicce, but when the notion takes me I wander to distant lands, and I would like to have thee to be my comrade."

"Nay, Sir Bear, I can not," said Wulfhere, though he wished greatly to do so.

He could not bring himself to part from Eflaeda, my daughter, whom he loved. So he turned back home, little dreaming how soon he would become blood brother to the stranger and the fame of the Bear Brethren would be known over all England.

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CHAPTER IX

HOW PENDA WISHED TO RID HIM OF HIS PRIESTS

NOW I have told you, lords, it was the great wish of Penda to restore the ancient gods. The land was being overrun with Christians, and with a boldness beyond pagan courage their missionaries penetrated even into the very heart of heathendom. Penda himself had put many to death, for they misled his people, he said, and made his warriors soft women; moreover, they were the arch-enemies of Thunar and Woden. In his great zeal for his false gods he appointed many priests to serve them and extend their interests.

These priests became an army, and knowing they were a privileged class they presumed much and did things freely that Penda would have slain others for doing. It was their policy to get the reins of power into their hands, or at least to supplant Penda's captains and be his sole advisers. To this end they trumped up charges from time to time against all such as stood in their way, charges of treason and conspiracy, and the king, deeming them holy and inspired by the gods, believed their word; so many a valiant man was sacrificed on Tiw's altar.

Now they served Penda's purpose in some ways, for they caused many to be put to death whom Penda had distrusted, but boldness carried them too far at last, and when they chose out three of Penda's bravest captains, all men whom the king trusted, he, who had by this time grown to have more zeal for himself than for the gods, began to grow aweary of their presumption and to cast about to find how he could put an end to it.

On the very night of the slaughter of his thanes, when his heart was sick for them, and the fires of wrath burned fierce in the furnace of his breast, he summoned me to his presence. I found him seated in his private room alone. A deep frown cast a shadow on his face and I could tell that he had some deep matter to reveal.

"Edbert, I sent for thee," he said, "for in the matter of which I wish to speak to thee I know thou canst be trusted."

"I hope, O King, that thou canst trust me in any matter," I answered.

"Perhaps, Edbert, perhaps," he returned, "but when thou hast learned to know as I do this accursed race, thou wilt not trust any in all things. But hearken, my soul grows weary of this slaughter. The priests begin to rule in Mercia, aye, they rule already, for they can send my bravest to their altars, and even I dare not forbid them. This thing must stop, Edbert, by Woden it must cease, for if it does not soon they will be haling Penda to the sacrifice, aye, and they will have the power. I trust thee in this matter, Edbert, because thou knowest as well as I they have their eye on thee, and when they dare thou wilt be sacrificed. What sayest thou?"

Now I knew well the words he spoke were true. For my own life I had long feared, and for my family, for these priests hated me. I knew their dark arts and their mystic knowledge, aye, and their secret plottings for chief power. I was a prophet too as much as they were, and had their gift of seeing visions and hearing strange mystic words spoken by invisible beings. They could not win me from the king to their own ranks, and so they lay in wait for me. I was glad then when I saw that the king meant to curb their power.

"My lord, thou art still king," I said. "These men, though priests, are mortal. If the sword fall on them they die like other men. Penda, thou hast the sword, also the power to wield it. Smite them, I say, smite them and have no mercy!"

He looked at me with his piercing eyes that seemed to cut into my very soul, and answered:

"Yea, Edbert, that is true, but to slay a priest is an accursed thing that will surely bring down even on a king the anger of the gods. Their person is sacred according to our laws, and it is forbidden for even me to put one to death. Thou knowest this."

"I call to mind, King, how several Summers gone when we went up against the Gwissei, one of thy priests—and he an arch-priest—dared to oppose thee. Thou slewest him, King, because he was a false priest and a traitor who lifted up his voice against the champion of the gods. Has the gods' anger lit upon thee since? Nay, but they have blessed thee. There are two kinds of priests, Lord King—true priests and false. A sin it is against the gods to slay the true, but even the gods will thank thee if thou rid them of the other."

"I like thy words," said Penda. "Come near and whisper softly what remedy thou

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canst devise, for I know thou hast a plan, thou subtle serpent thou."

I went near to the king and whispered softly to him.

"Good! It is well conceived," he said when I had finished. "Edbert, thou art my right hand. Thou art more to me than my chief captains. It will go hard if I and thou are not soon rid of these power-hunting priests."

Now Penda lived at this time in his fortress at Wodensburg. On the walls some yards from his usual residence he had built a little wooden tower containing but one room. This he had richly furnished, and because it was cool in the hot nights of Summer he often slept there.

One morning early cries were heard from the wooden tower, and those who heard looked up and saw the place all wreathed in flame with Penda standing just outside the door crying aloud for all the people to come and see how an attempt had been made to murder him in his sleep, and burn his body. He held in his hand a long knife that he had found, he said, on the floor of the room wherein he slept, and he pointed to a rope that hung down from the wall.

"Who is the thief, the murderer who has done this?" he roared. "What man has dared to climb up to the king to murder him with this knife?"

A great crowd had by now assembled, and fear was on every face as they watched the flames lick up the timbers and saw the king in berserk rage shaking his fists and crying out for vengeance on the wretch who would have slain him.

"I will have the life of this foul traitor," he yelled, "and not his life alone, but the lives of all his people, his wives and his children. All will go down to death together—to Tiw's dark kingdom will they go to receive the reward of traitors. Let my heralds go out to every tribe of Mercia, and bring the head men to me. Let them summon my head priests also that they may consult the gods together and find from them the authors of this deed; for my heart tells me they are many.

"Let them call hither all my captains and my thanes and councilors. One moon from now, on great Tiw's festival, let all assemble here. Let none be absent on pain of death and torment. The gods will show the murderers, aye, the gods and my faithful priests."

So heralds went out, for the command of Penda was urgent, to summon all the chief men of Mercia, and every day they kept arriving, they and their families, their wives and little ones. It was a sad sight, lords, to see them come, for not one knew for certain that he would be spared. Fear was in the heart of every man who stood not in well with the priests, for he knew it was more than likely that this meant his doom. Yet all had hope and prayed hard to the gods; they prayed hard and slept little.

On the day before Tiw's festival every earl and thane, councilor and head man, came as was the the custom into the royal hall to bow before the king, and put his hands into Penda's hands in token of allegiance. The priests watched well to see on whom Penda smiled and those on whom he frowned, and as he was sullen and feigned great anger still, he frowned on almost all. From my place by the king I watched the king from the corner of my eye, and I could see them whisper together as Penda frowned or smiled.

When Immin knelt the king scowled darkly on him, feigning displeasure as I supposed so as to deceive the priests, and when I looked at them I saw a look of satisfaction on their faces that boded ill for Immin. He had ever opposed their influence. And now it was my turn to kneel.

If Penda frowned I had no way of seeing, but I judged that he did and fiercely, for when I rose and looked toward the priests' corner I saw a sneer of hatred on the face of Icil the high-priest, and felt a shiver of fear go up my spine as I realized how uncertain were Penda's moods. How was I to know after all whether he feigned or no? Perchance it was his will to rid himself of me.

The ceremony of allegiance ended. The trumpet blew and the people were dismissed. It was the day before Tiw's festival. Festival or fast, sun or cloud, life or death, which would it be? Strong men's hearts failed them for fear as they waited for the dawn.

THE sun came up blood-red over the hills, and the heavens were ominous of impending sorrow. In the center of the large open space before the royal house an altar had been raised and decorated with the symbols of Tiw.

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It was the altar on which the living offerings were put to death, and on it were laid the sharp two-edged daggers.

Some twenty paces from this altar there was a large altar-like structure on which wood was laid. It was the funeral pyre and on it the bodies of the victims would be burned. The people gathered in a great half-circle silently before the altar, the thanes and captains, councilors and head men to the front. On one side of the altar a high throne had been erected for the king.

A trumpet sounded and the gate of the king's house swung open. From it came the king in his royal robes, a score of his body-guard with him, and took his place upon the throne, his guard at his back. Now, lords, always it was the king's will that on such occasions Immin and Eafa and myself with certain other chosen lords should take our places by him, but the night before he had sent word that today we stand not with him. We stood, therefore, with the other great lords of Mercia, inside the ring, and about thirty paces from the king's throne.

Now Immin and the other lords came about with anxious faces, and Immin asked—

"What means this, Edbert, and why stand we not with the king?"

"Ask that of the arch-priest," I answered.

"Dost mean that that false villain will choose us for his altar?"

"I fear it is even so," I said.

Now Immin swore a fearful oath.

"Say, lords," he whispered hoarsely, "did ye bring your weapons as I warned you?"

"Aye," all answered, and I saw the glint of steel as each man drew his cloak slightly aside.

They hid their arms for it was not lawful to carry them on these occasions; except only the king's body-guard and the king himself none might go armed.

"We are enough to slay these seventy priests and the king's guards," a great earl said.

"Aye, and will do it," said another.

Another trumpet blew, and seventy white-robed priests entered the circle headed by the arch-priest Icil. He took his stand before the altar, a chief priest on each side of him, the others ranged crescent-shape in equal numbers on each side of the altar, three ranks deep. Then began a long, dreary droning service of chant and prayer and prostrations and mystic ceremony, till I could see that Penda, reverent though he was, began to grow impatient. The arch-priest saw it too, and, descending from the altar steps where he led the service, he stood before the king.

It was a weird, uncanny sight to see those two on whom depended the lives of so many there present thus facing one another; Icil in long white robe, relieved only by the symbols of the god which hung about his neck, his long white beard reaching to his middle, eagle nose and stern, deep-set, fierce eyes and overhanging brows; the king, like a king indeed, seated with head thrust forward, his elbow on the arm of his throne, his chin in his hand, gnawing at his fingers and looking down with dark and frowning gaze on the face of the priest before whose look there were few in Mercia who did not quail.

For a few moments they remained thus, each gazing on the other. The king was the first to speak.

"Why standest thou there, Priest? Thy mummery is done; begin now with my business," he growled.

It looked as if the arch-priest thought to rebuke him for his irreverent remark, but perchance he thought better of it. He only said:

"Thou hast a request to make of Tiw. Now state thy case, O King, that we may inquire of the god."

Then Penda rose and in a loud voice told his story.

"Inquire now of the gods," he ordered, "that they may make known who have done this thing, for be they few or many, great or small, they all shall perish."

Icil bowed low, then went back to the altar. The other priests closed in behind him and prostrated themselves upon their faces, while Icil called on the god to make known the would-be murderers of the king. The arch-priest fell upon his knees and for some minutes there was silence, intense and full of awe. Then he arose and with hands and eyes upraised to heaven droned out his vision.

"I see a lonely mountain-side far off among the hills. I see three men climbing the steep rocks, talking softly as they go. I see them disappear as if they had melted

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into the stony hillside. I see a cave. My spirit enters there. I find the three men in the cave, and others there beside. They sit around a small camp-fire and talk. And now the shadows of the night close in. More men enter the cave, more and yet more, till there are many there. I see a man who seems a chief among them rise in his place; listen! I hear his words:

" 'Brothers, we are all here—threescore and ten, save one. Now let us get to business. Penda the king has used us cruelly. We can not stand his tyranny any longer; we have stood it like so many sheep too long already. Penda the king must die. This we decided at our last meeting in this place. Our time is short but let us not now discuss the matter further but get to the business for which we are met here. Bring hither the lot.'

"He ceases speaking. I see another rise. In his hand he carries a large bowl and in the bowl a sack of pebbles. The speaker takes them from him, and placing the bowl upon a shelf of rock above his head he pours the pebbles from the bag into it. I see them fall. They are all white—no, one is red, blood-red.

"I see the men pass one by one before the leader, and each reaches up, takes a pebble out and closes his hand fast upon it; and last of all the speaker takes one also. He makes a sign and each man holds his pebble up. One of the three I saw enter the cave, 'tis he has the red stone.

" 'Brother, thou must do the deed,' I hear the spokesman say to him. 'Remember, Penda sleeps tonight in the Summer tower. A rope will help thee scale the wall; thou knowest then what to do.'

"I hear the leader dismiss the men. They pass out of the cave. My spirit follows him of the red stone through the night. He comes at last to his own house. He gets a rope of hide and ties a loop upon the end of it. The night is dark; only a few stars shine among the clouds. He makes his way to the king's house. I see him cast the loop end of the rope over the wall.

"The second throw it catches. He climbs to the top and makes his way to the tower. He sprinkles oil upon the wood and fires it. He tries the door but finds it shut. He pushes it and it creaks. He hears the king stir in his bed. He drops the knife and flies. I see him slide down the rope and hurry to his house. In the light of that flaming tower I see his face. He is a young man, fair, with a scar on his cheek. Go one and search him out!"

In breathless silence the people stand listening in horrible dread to the high-priest.

A priest now leaves the group that are still on their faces before the altar. He bows first to the altar and then to the king, and as he faces us I see he has a heavy veil across his face. With steps as of one in a trance he comes in our direction. We have our right hands on our weapons and if he touches one of us he dies, for we have sworn to stand or fall together. Nearer he comes and nearer.

A moment he hesitates as he reaches us, then passes on. We see a young thane standing in the front rank with his friends, a brave young man, one who has shown great promise.

The priest stops right before him, then seizes him fiercely by the arm and drags him forward. We hear a groan pass through the group of friends behind him as with lowered head the young thane passes on toward the altar. We note as he passes that he has a great scar on his left cheek. As he comes before the king he shakes the priest's hand from his arm and appeals to Penda in a loud voice.

"King," he cries, "I demand the ordeal of water."

"It is well," replies the king; "come, stand thou here."

The thane takes his place some paces from the throne, the priest remaining with him.

"Is it enough, O King?" the arch-priest cries. "Is the lion satisfied with the blood of one sheep?"

"Nay, I will have them all—all the false traitors!" roars Penda.

Icil once more lifts up his voice describing another thane, and another priest comes forth as the first had done, picks a man out from the crowd, and leads him forward. This goes on till many are chosen, each appealing for the ordeal of water or fire as he comes before the king, then taking his stand with the priest who picked him out, beside the altar. And now full threescore men are chosen, the flower of Penda's army, and of the sixty-nine conspirators but nine are left.

Now in our group we were just nine.

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CHAPTER X

THE VISION OF ICIL, ARCH-PRIEST OF WODEN, AND THE COMING OF AIDAN THE SAINT TO WODENSBURGH

"LORDS," said I to them softly, "forbear to use your weapons till the last moment. Methinks that Penda has a purpose in all this; I read it in his face. He will not see his best warriors all perish. Time enough to use our axes when we know that we are to be offered. Let us keep together and demand the ordeal."

Some of them demurred, but at last all agreed. Nine priests came forward toward us. One sank his nails into my arm and dragged me after him. I turned to see another sieze on Immin, who thrust his iron fist into the priest's leering face so that he fell prone upon the ground. There was a muttered exclamation from the others, but Immin and the rest followed quietly enough the priests that led them, and having appealed for the ordeal we stood with those who had first been chosen.

And now there might be heard the murmurs of the multitude on every side, like far-off thunder growing ever louder and louder, till it broke out in angry exclamations that drowned the wailings of our families. Women with babes in arms strove desperately to come to their doomed husbands, and sobbed and cried as they were thrust back by the soldiers. Old men with hoary heads made moan and wrung their hands, and strong men wept and cursed and stormed at their own helplessness.

Penda rose and lifted up his hand for silence.

"I thank you, Priests, ye have been zealous in my service," he began. "I never knew I had so many enemies. I have great joy to find out who they be, for now I know that these whom I had deemed my friends are false to me. Oh, I could weep when I think how I nourished them and raised them to high honor in my service. Behold, this is the return I get. A brood of serpents nourished in my bosom—a herd of dogs fed from my hand turned wolf to tear and rend me—a band of traitors!

"Say now, High-Priest, thou faithful servitor of Tiw, thou friend of Penda, whose one great earthly aim is to be a stanch, firm, humble servant of thy king, tell me now, thou who despisest worldly power and treatest it as a thing of naught in thy unselfishness, who was the man who did conceive this plot, for I hold him to be tenfold more guilty than this poor wretch who was his tool?"

"Edbert, Lord King, 'twas Edbert, so said the gods," Icil shouted, pointing with a leer of hatred at me.

"Ha, sayest thou so?" said Penda, and he looked at me a moment and I thought I could see his lips move as if he said under his breath 'twas Edbert indeed conceived this plot—Edbert and Penda.

"Edbert, Edbert, thou sly, thou cunning fox, methought from the beginning thou hadst a hand in this," he cried, and turning his head he laughed, then looked at me again and laughed once more.

"Forgive my mirth, friend Edbert, but thou standest with such solemnity upon thy features I can not choose but laugh. My heart told me thou wert no enemy to thy king, but the priests say the gods proclaim thee guilty, so guilty thou must be, for the gods err not."

He spoke, then held his sides and laughed again, and it was long ere he could restrain himself. He turned once again to the high-priest.

"My faithful Icil, now tell me who was to mount my throne when I was murdered? I long to look upon the face of him who was deemed more worthy of a crown than I."

"'Twas Immin, my Lord King, so said the gods," the high-priest replied.

"Immin, come forward, Immin, till I look upon thee," Penda called.

Immin strode forward.

"Didst think my friend thou wert a better man than I? That Mercia would be more glorious under thee—and that the gods would have a worthier champion?"

"Nay, King, 'tis all a lie, a false, ——, wicked lie!" Immin hissed in his anger.

"How can that be, friend Immin," Penda continued quietly, "when the most holy gods declare it true?"

"'Tis not the gods but their false priests!" roared Immin.

"Knowest thou not 'tis blasphemy to speak ill of the priests? In so doing thou art reviling them whose representatives they are. Art not afraid great Tiw will smite thee?"

"Have done, King, with thy mockery; as for thy god let him strike an he will, I fear him not."

The king looked on his thane a moment,

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then turned aside and laughed a great, loud laugh.

"Immin, I thought myself the bravest man in Mercia," he said, "but I do think that thou art braver still, to give the lie to the gods, and thou too about to go before them. Enough!" he shouted. "Bring forth the caldron."

A great brass basin full a yard across and two feet deep was lifted from the fire behind the altar and carried by four priests before the king. It was boiling still as they set it down, and clouds of steam rose from it.

"Bring forth the man who would have murdered me, his king, and let the gods decide his guilt or innocence," Penda ordered.

Two priests led the thane with the scar upon his cheek forward. He rolled back the sleeve of his tunic to the shoulder, then at the word plunged his arm into the seething water, held it there a moment, then drew it out—a white, blistered, bloodless arm, a cruel sight. The two priests seized him to take him to the altar as the test had shown him to be guilty.

"Stay," commanded Penda, "let him stand aside. The gods have shown him to be guilty, let the next man come forward."

How much further Penda would have gone I know not, but suddenly there was a stir behind us and I heard a voice cry—

"Hold, King, enough of this barbarity!"

And looking around we saw a stranger hastening toward us. He carried a pilgrim's staff and was clad in a robe not unlike that of our heathen priests except that it had a cowl hanging over the back down to the girdle. This cowl at first he wore over his head, but as he came near the king he flung it back, disclosing a shaven head and a fair, gentle face with deep blue eyes and noble features.

The king looked at him in amazement and asked—

"Who art thou and why comest thou here?"

"I am Aidan, a priest of the Most High God," replied the Christian, "and He hath sent me to rebuke thee for this cruelty and to bid thee turn from thy heathen worship and serve Him and His Son."

"Thou art very bold, Sir Christian, thus to thrust thyself into the lion's mouth. Our god is very hungry and cries out for food. See, all these are to be offered on his altar. What is to hinder that thou also be made meat for the god?"

"My God in whom I trust is able to deliver me, and He will deliver me, O King, out of thy hand as He delivered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I say to thee, O Penda, enemy of my faith, thy barbarous play has gone quite far enough. Satan, the prince of devils, has put a lying spirit into the mouths of these thy priests, and they have accused the innocent before thee. Ask now of me concerning this, and I will inquire of the Lord and He will reveal the murderer, for this I know that these men here are innocent, else had the Lord not sent me to speak to thee."

The high-priest in great wrath sought here to interfere, but Penda ordered him back.

"Sir Christian, I take thee at thy word," he said. "Inquire of thy God, and if He tell thee right then thou mayest go thy way, but if falsely thou diest on Tiw's altar."

THE Christian priest turned his gaze up to heaven, and raising his hands he implored the aid of his God. For a few moments he remained thus, then as one in an ecstacy he began:

"I see a chamber in a great house and in it sits a man alone. He is wearied with certain servants and would have them put to death. He calls another to him and together they make a plan to rid him of these false servants by setting for them a snare. Their plan succeeds, and the faithless ones are caught in the trap they set for others."

He paused, then looked at the king.

"King, have I said enough? Thou askest me who was it placed a rope upon the wall, fired thy tower and left a knife upon the floor. The Lord my God hath shown me."

The Christian came close up before the king, and raising his hand within three feet of Penda's face he paused a moment and then cried:

" 'Twas thou thyself, O King!"

A thrill of awe and wonder passed through the great crowd around; they fairly gasped in their amazement. All looked to see the Christian lying in his blood with Skull-Cleaver in his brain; instead they saw the king rise from his seat, and shouting aloud he cried:

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"Hearken, ye Mercians! This man and he alone has solved the riddle, and he a Christian priest. 'Twas I who did this deed. I burned the tower. I fixed the rope and left the knife outside the door. I wished to see if these my priests were true or false. Ye see that they are false, all of them. This lying dog who calls himself high-priest invents a story, all a villainous lie, that my best warriors may be put to death, not for my welfare nor to magnify the gods, but to get the power into his own hands in Mercia. See, there they stand and near them the brave men whom they have doomed with their wives and little ones. What shall be done with them, my people?"

A great shout went up from the multitude.

"Let them be slain! Let them die!"

Then Penda turned to those the priests had doomed.

"At them!" he thundered. "Smite them with ax and sword! Hew them in pieces; let not one remain!"

We seized our weapons, and those who had none snatched them from the soldiers. The Christian stood before us to bar our path; we swept him aside like a straw before the wind. With a wild leap and a yell we were upon our would-be murderers. Revenge and hatred filled our hearts to overflowing and now burst out like an undammed torrent. We swept upon them like a river, and when we left off smiting, a mass of bloody corpses was all that remained of those false priests. Their screams and curses died away. The shouts and yells of the people as they urged us on to the slaughter ceased. Grim silence reigned as we wiped our bloody weapons on the grass, and the crowd came near to gaze upon the hated dead.

The king strode over to me as I panted for breath.

"Edbert, thus die the enemies of Penda," he said. "Tiw helped them not. I saw no thunderbolts descend from heaven. See, the sun shines and the heavens smile upon this bloody deed. The gods are satisfied with us; their priests were false. Before another day is done we will appoint new priests; the gods must have their servitors. What sayest thou if we—ha, what is this? One of these villainous priests is come to life."

I looked in the direction he was looking, and saw a body move among the heap of slain. Slowly and painfully it raised itself upon its hands and lifted up its head. Its face was smeared with dust and gore and in its side a great wound gaped from which the entrails hung. The countenance was smashed beyond all recognition, but the long beard and the robe showed us it was Icil the arch-priest.

"Hearken, King!" he cried, and his voice was like the raven's croak.

"I thought thou wert at rest in Frigga's bosom," the king replied.

"I have a message to deliver first, King Penda, and then I go to be with Tiw. Beware of that fox, Edbert, beware of him I say, and of Cyneswithe thy wife and Burgenhild thy mother. Even now they plan thy death, O King. Thou wilt believe my word when Edbert's spear sticks in thy throat. Once more I say—beware!"

The last word went out with a shriek, and with it went the soul of Icil.

The king turned to me and looked into my face.

"They say the dead speak always truth," he said. "This priest was as good as dead. What thinkest thou, Edbert?"

"Nay, Penda," I answered. "It is as the Christian said, the gods have put a lying spirit into his mouth."

" 'Tis very true," Penda said as he began to walk away, "Icil was ever a great liar; and yet 'tis very strange—'tis very strange."

The king's guards formed up behind him as he walked toward his house, and I and all the rest returned each to his own house.

THAT night Penda sent for me. I went and found him alone with the Christian priest, whose name was Aidan. Now this Aidan as you know, lords, was a monk of Iona where there was a monastery of Christians founded by Saint Columba of blessed memory. Afterward he became Bishop of Lindisfarne near Bebbenburgh in Bernicia, and by him and his monks all Mercia and Northumbria were brought to the Christian faith.

"This priest would speak to me of his faith," Penda said to me as I entered, "and I have a mind to listen to him, for it may well be I have held in greater contempt than I ought this faith that produces men like him. Thou art a priest of Woden, Edbert, and being better acquainted with the mysteries of our belief than I am,

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I have sent for thee that thou mayest answer this man whenever I may be unable to do so. Speak on now, Christian."

The holy man raised his hands toward heaven as if invoking help from God, and then he spoke. Ah, lords, such words of sweetness fell from his lips my heathen heart went out to him, and even Penda, hardened pagan though he was, was greatly moved. With head bent forward the king drank in his every word, keeping his eyes the while on Aidan's face, and when the holy man had finished telling the old story of the blessed Christ, Penda sat back in his seat and a deep sigh escaped him.

That sermon was the beginning of my conversion to the Christian faith, lords, and from that day on I thought much of Him who died for men upon the tree, and little or nothing of Thunar and Woden. Yet in Penda's presence I could not confess how I was moved, and I did what I could to appear indifferent.

"Ah, my son, my son," said the holy man, speaking to Penda, "so mighty in carnal battles, what a champion of Jesus Christ thou wouldst be, using thy strong arm and thy great gifts in His service, battling against the powers of darkness, cruelty and shame, and setting up in this land that holy faith that would make its people happy and united. Come, Penda, my son, the day of thy gods is gone. Let it go with its cruelty, its immorality, its oppression, its bloody sacrifices; for the sun of a new day is struggling to arise, the day of Christian love.

"I tell thee, Penda, that the beams of that sun already shine, though dimly as yet, over all England, and no power on earth can stop its rise. Ah, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, for the Galilean conquers and will conquer. Be thou another Paul of Tarsus. Use thy great gifts for the furtherance of Christ's gentle reign, and thy name will go down like Paul's through all posterity forevermore as one of those who helped to bless the earth. The Saviour calls thee, Penda. Hark to His voice: 'My son, my son, why persecutest thou Me?'

"Dost hear Him knocking at thy heart? Dost hear His call? Ah, shut not the door against Him, close not thy ear to His word. Receive Him and He will receive thee, and thy sins He will abundantly pardon. Yea, though they be as scarlet He shall purge thee and thou shalt be clean; He shall wash thee and thou shalt be whiter than snow."

The good saint paused, and Penda answered him nothing. He was moved as he had never been before.

Then it was that I, Edbert, sinned a great sin—the Lord have mercy. I saw that the king's heart was touched, and though mine was touched also the spirit of revenge was still strong in me. As Jonah hated to see the Ninevites reform and so escape the judgment of God, so in the wickedness of my heart I could not bear to see Penda the tyrant, the ruthless oppressor and slayer of so many people, escape the judgment of the world to come and my righteous vengeance here. The cup of his iniquity was not yet full; let him go on and fill it.

Ah, I had many a grudge to settle with King Penda, and would have many more ere all was done. I did not therefore give the words of Aidan time to sink further into Penda's heart, but strove by my questions to turn his thoughts to other channels.

"Christian," I said, "thou sayest that thy God came down from heaven, and men took Him and hanged him to a cross and bitterly entreated Him. Methinks He was a feeble God to suffer this."

He looked at me as if in disappointment that I should interrupt, and answered:

" 'Twas not that He was feeble, but that it was His Father's plan that He should suffer at the hand of man."

"But He was the Son of God thou sayest, and yet He suffered death. How can a God die?"

"Is not Balder one of thy gods, and did he not die?" he asked.

"Aye, he died indeed, but at his death he only passed to another life. He is alive, not dead."

"Even so it is with Christ," he answered, "for on the third day He rose again and now sits on the right hand of His Father in heaven in majesty and great glory. It was His human body alone that died."

"But why did He not come down among men in power and might, and accomplish His great object, the salvation of men, as Woden would, by slaying His enemies and setting up His throne upon their carcasses?"

" 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' saith the Lord God," Aidan

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answered. "He came to set up a kingdom indeed, but not in blood. Mercy and charity and humility were to be the corner-stones of it, for He would reign in love."

"Prate not of love, Sir Priest, to hardened warriors. It is a woman's virtue and men despise it."

"Yet have I heard," said Aidan, "that of all the gods the one most beautiful and most loved by his fellow-gods was Balder, the god of love. Despise not thou that virtue and that god whom the gods thou dost worship despise not but hold in highest reverence."

Now I could see that with all my wit and cunning I was getting much the worst of this argument with the Christian.

"Woden is the god I honor," I said crossly, "Woden and Thunar."

"That may be so," he returned quietly, "but these both honored Balder. Art thou greater and more wise than Woden?"

I saw Penda grin at my discomfiture.

"But I tell thee, Priest," I cried, "that we are warriors and councilors; wisdom therefore and courage are the virtues that we must honor most; therefore we pay most honor to Woden and Thunar, who represent these virtues among the gods."

"And I tell thee, friend," Aidan replied, "though wisdom and courage are great virtues, yet is there no virtue nobler than love, nay, nor half so noble; and that Thunar and Woden knew when they honored and regarded most of all the gods the love-god, Balder. Love may not be a manly virtue, friend, but it is something better, it is a god-like one, the noblest and the best of all. What? Is he more to thee who rages in the fight and cares not if thou perish, than he who gives his life to save thine?

"Or is he more to thee who plots and plans to conquer men and kingdoms and to crush them down in their own blood, than he whose love prompts him to give his energy, his powers, his time, his very life itself toward raising men up and making them good and happy? Christ was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, yet left He highest heaven to take our flesh and suffer for us. He has built up a kingdom over which He rules alone by power of love, and it is the greatest kingdom in the world. The greatest kings on earth bow down to Him and call Him Lord.

"Who art thou, friend, to despise Him Whom the highest hold in honor, or that love by the power of which He rules? That is the truest courage, the truest wisdom that is inspired by love, and love is the greatest thing in Heaven or earth, for God Himself is love. Despise it not, Edbert, son of Eorpwald; despise it not, Penda Wybbason, for it alone can bring you to Christ, our Lord, and He alone can lead you to highest Heaven."

I could say no more. I felt that what he said was true, though the old spirit in me rebelled against the feeling.

"Friend Aidan," said the king, "we are glad to hear thy explanation of thy faith. We must confess, Edbert and I, that we sorely misunderstood it, and erred in too much persecution of it. I honor thee, Priest, for thy great courage and boldness, and because thou hast moved me I will grant thee a favor which I never thought to have heard my own tongue utter. Henceforth I will not prevent thy monks coming to my land to preach the Gospel of Christ. For myself the old gods suit me well, and I will still do what I can to set them up, but thou and thine, friend Aidan, are safe henceforth in Mercia. Now go."

The holy man raised his hands above the king.

"The Lord God bless thee, Penda, thee and thy house, for this good word." And he turned and followed the guard who stood without and who had been instructed to care for his comfort till he chose to leave the town.

"Edbert, at last thou hast met thy match," Penda said to me when Aidan was gone. "With all thy cunning thou wert as a child in his hand."

"It is so, King," I answered.

CHAPTER XI

HOW WULFHERE WAS CARRIED OFF BY THE BEAR

I HAVE told you much about myself, lords, and much about King Penda, called Penda the Strong, but very little have I said of Wulfhere of whom I started out to speak, and of Elflaeda the Fair. Now will I tell you the story of these two.

I have already said I had two wives, Ostryth and Acha. The one, the mother of Elflaeda, I loved; the other upon whom I fastened Wulfhere as her son gave me

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much cause to worry, and I loved her little. Wulfhere she cared not for. Her woman's instinct told her he was not her son. She saw Cyneswithe and the queen make much of him, and nothing of the son she knew to be her own. They came often to my house, and the child Wulfhere they kissed and fondled.

They came little now that he was grown almost a man, but more than once I caught Acha looking, a strange look on her face, on Cyneswithe and Wulfhere as they stood side by side. She saw the former's face reflected in the latter, except the eyes; the eyes she saw were Penda's. The form, the walk, the actions all were Penda's. There was none of her blood in Wulfhere she felt certain, and she had at last concluded that he was the king's son.

As time went by the terrors of my warning began to die away, and whisperings took the place of silence. She whispered to a neighbor of her doubts, her fears, her thoughts, her belief concerning Wulfhere; her neighbor whispered it to her lord; her lord who loved me not whispered it to Penda. Now the king remembered that the dead babe I had taken into his presence eighteen years before looked not like him. He remembered to have remarked it to me. He knew Wulfhere by sight, and recalled he looked much like himself and Cyneswithe. He knew his wife and his mother were much at my house.

The words of the dying priest came back to him. There was a mystery here that concerned him and he would smell it out. But first he must get me, Edbert, out of the way.

He called me to his presence.

"Edbert, take men and go to the people of the Magesetas, and say to them their tribute is overdue. See too that their regiments are in order, and come again and bring me word."

I wondered why a lesser man would not have done for such a mission. Soon I was to know his reason for sending me.

I went to my house to bid farewell to my wives and children. Acha received me coldly, and I could see my going was a matter of indifference to her; but when I came to Ostryth's quarters, she wept and clung to me and prayed me to take her with me.

"What troubles thee, Ostryth, my wife?" I asked.

"Oh, go not from me!" she pleaded. "I fear that something terrible will happen, and that if thou go thou wilt never see us more."

"But I can not take thee, wife; it is impossible," I urged.

"Wouldst have thy Ostryth and Elflaeda murdered?" she cried. "Take us, my husband, thou art wise and thou canst find a way; oh, take us with thee!" And she fell at my feet and wept.

What could I do, lords? I raised her up and kissed her as she clung about my neck, and said I would dare Penda's anger for her sake. Sweetly she thanked me; she was a good wife.

How were we to manage it? I could not take them without permission from the king. What excuse could I give for asking that permission? I was at my wits' end. Ostryth herself solved the problem for us.

"A man may put away his wife," she said. "The king no longer interferes in these matters. If any ask thee, say thou hast put me away because thou hast grown tired of me. Say thou art taking me back to my people."

I bade her take with her Elflaeda and Wulfhere, and leave that very night. They were to go on ahead, and I and my company would overtake them the next day, and escort them to Ostryth's people, for they lay not far from the Magesetas, only north on the borders of Deira.

They left that night, and I with my company left at dawn the next day. We overtook them ten miles on the road, and they rose from the place where they had been resting and joined us. I spoke roughly to my wife, and when the men looked questioningly at me I told them I had put her away and was sending her back whence she came, for no longer could I stand her bitter tongue; besides she was a barren tree that yielded me no fruit.

"The king?" they asked.

"Doubt not, I will answer to the king," I said.

We journeyed on mile after mile, the pace too quick for the women, who were almost ready to faint with weariness. I pitied them in my heart, but knew I must show them no sympathy. Wulfhere manfully helped them on. He almost carried them at times, and I was glad for their sakes when the sun began to set and they could rest and sleep. More than once along that

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weary way the men made litters of their spears, and of their own accord carried the women.

On the sixth day, when we had reached the foot-hills of a mountainous district, we camped on top of a cliff overlooking a deep valley through which a mountain river rushed. Ostryth, Elflaeda and Wulfhere sat apart upon the rock, and I and my soldiers farther up the cliff. I stretched myself upon the grass to think, and if possible to sleep, and so I did not see at first what happened. It seems that opposite us across the valley there was a cave. Elflaeda was first to see a huge brown bear come from the cave with two cubs trotting behind her. The three began to play upon the rock, and Elflaeda clapped her hands with glee as she looked upon the pretty sight.

"What would I not give," she cried, "to have one of those little bears."

Wulfhere did not say a word, nor did they miss him till they saw him standing far below them by the river-side making ready to swim the stream. Their cries awaked me, and I went to where they stood, only to see the venturesome lad striking bravely across the waters that every moment threatened to engulf him. Few could have swum that current, and not one in twenty thousand would have been foolhardy enough to attempt it.

We saw him land on the other side and shake the water from his clothes, then turn to wave his hand at us. We shouted to him to return, and I cursed him for a fool, but he paid no heed; he only turned again to climb the rock to the shelf above which were the bears. I called upon my men to descend and swim the river and bring the lad back. They shook their heads.

"We can not ford that stream," they said.

I offered them rewards.

"If thou wert to give us all the gold in Mercia," they answered, "we could but drown in those wild waters."

There was nothing I could do but watch and pray the gods to work a miracle to save the boy.

UP THE steep rock he went till he reached the shelf on which the bears still gamboled. They did not see him till he was fairly on them. Swinging his sword he sprang upon the great bear. So sudden was his attack we saw his sword sink deep into her shoulder. With a bellow of rage she sprang back and made ready to dash him down with her terrible paw. Once more he was upon her. Up swung the sword, out swept the paw; the two met with terrific force and we saw the whole foreleg of the bear, lopped off close to the body, fly clear of the shelf and drop with a splash into the water far beneath.

With a growl of pain the bear fairly threw herself upon him. We saw him hold his sword-point toward her breast as she came down upon him. Bear and man went crashing to the ground. I held my breath and wrung my hands in an agony of suspense. The great brute seemed to be tearing him with her teeth. We could see shreds of his tunic fly from her mouth.

Then her head dropped forward, she lurched to one side and fell, and Wulfhere rose from under her body and put his foot upon her as he dragged out his sword. The bear was dead. He seized one of the cubs, biting and snarling, and tucking it under his left arm he made for the place where he had ascended. He had not reached it when suddenly he found confronting him the male bear. The monster rose upon his haunches, and before Wulfhere could draw his sword a terrible stroke of the animal's paw stretched him senseless on the rock—dead, as we thought.

The bear, a huge fellow, brown and white like the one that had fought Immin's Danes, walked over to where Wulfhere's body lay, bit deep into his thigh, then began to examine the dead body of his mate. Leaving that he came back to Wulfhere. Seizing him in his jaws and followed by the two cubs, he made his way up the side of the mountain and out of sight into the dense woods beyond.

We descended to the river hoping that somewhere we could find a place to cross. One man plunged in but was nearly drowned, and with great difficulty we rescued him. For a mile up and down the stream we went looking for a ford. Alas, we found none, and with a sad heart I returned to Ostryth and Elflaeda.

"Where is Wulfhere, my father?" Elflaeda cried.

"Dead, my daughter; he is gone forever," I answered.

"Ah, could you not find him? Maybe

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he is not dead. Go, try again, my father!" she wailed.

"We can not cross the stream," I said, "and if we could, into the dark hills we could never trace him. Alas, that I was born to see this day! My son is dead!"

Elflaeda uttered a bitter cry and fell in a swoon at my feet.

We waited in that place for two whole nights and a day, thinking that perhaps the bear would return to his lair, but he returned not; then we left the spot and went on toward the country of the Magesetas. Not a word for two days did Elflaeda utter; Wulfhere, her more than brother, was dead.

She buried him in her bosom and closed and locked the door of his sepulcher; but in the night when all the rest were asleep I could hear her heavy sobbing as she wept and mourned for him, and in a whispered tone called on him to come back. My heart was sad for her, lords, as sad as for Wulfhere, for well I loved them both.

At last we reached our destination and the time of parting with my wife and daughter came. I called them privately into a room in the house where I was staying. I kissed my wife as she fondly clung to my neck, and told her that when I could I would leave unhappy Mercia and come to her in her own land; then drawing Elflaeda apart I spoke to her these words:

"Elflaeda, my daughter, joy of my old heart, the time is come when I must say farewell. It grieves me sorely thus to part with thee, but it must be. Thou art fast growing to be a woman; the fairest woman in the land thou wilt be. Thou wilt not have a father to guard thee and choose for thee a mate, nor even a brother. Men will come from far to woo thee, earls and princes, and it may be kings will come to lay their homage at thy feet.

"My heart's desire for thee, my daughter, is that thou may'st be happy. When the time comes choose him for mate whom thou canst love and who loves thee, one who is true and noble, noble in mind and soul I mean, and whether he be king or prince or earl or common thane, with him thou wilt be happy."

"My father," she said, "speak not to me of such things. My heart is desolate for Wulfhere who has been slain through my folly. No other man can make me happy, for him only do I love, and I can love no other."

I longed to tell her Wulfhere was not her brother. But no, the secret must still be kept now more than ever.

"My child," I said, "remember that he was thy brother. Such love is for another than a brother."

"Of that I know not," she returned, "but my heart tells me that forever I am his and he is mine. Freely would I give him myself, body, soul and honor. I am all his till death. I know not if I am right or wrong, I only say what my heart tells me."

Strange, thought I, that a woman's heart can see through men's deceptions, where her mind flounders. Have I not always said the heart is the surest guide? 'Tis always right. Her heart could tell her what her mind could not, that Wulfhere was not her brother.

I could not rebuke her further, poor lonely child.

"Try to forget thy sorrow, daughter," I said as I kissed her farewell. "It may be we shall never meet again. Forget not thy father, child, and the words he has this day spoken to thee. This life is a stormy Wintry sea and we are but frail barks upon its angry billows, tossed here and there in its rough sport, sometimes dashed up upon the rocks, sometimes submerged beneath its depths, less often left to float in calm untroubled waters; always in the end overcome by its rude violence and hurled to death.

"Yet I believe there is another life beyond this one, and death is but the usher leading us from one life to the other. In this life it may be we shall not meet again, but we will in the other. Take courage then, my child. May the great gods have thee in their keeping. Farewell! Farewell, my child! Elflaeda, my sweet daughter!"

We kissed and parted, and I watched Elflaeda and Ostryth till they passed out of sight upon the road to Deira with the two soldiers I had given them to escort them thither. My soul was hungry for the love I lost, and I was lone and desolate.

CHAPTER XII

HOW EDBERT THE THANE FEIGNS MADNESS BEFORE PENDA, AND ENDURES THE ORDEAL OF WATER

A WEEK I stayed among the Magesetas waiting for the delayed tribute, inspecting their battalions and their garrisons, and as Penda's legate meeting in council

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the king and nobles of the realm. On the eighth day I set my face for home. Not two days' journey had we gone when we met a company of Penda's soldiers. I knew their presence there boded no good for me.

"What word from Mercia?" I asked.

"This," said the captain, stepping forward: "Penda hath sent us hither to apprehend thee and thy wife and children."

"My son is dead," I said; "my wife and daughter are with their people; as for me I am here—take me."

"Why didst thou steal thy family from Mercia like a thief in the night?" he asked.

"Can I not do what I will with my own?" I answered. "My wife I have put away, and the child has chosen to go with her to her people. Send thither and fetch them."

"Know this," he continued, and a mocking sneer was on his face: "Penda has done great honor to thy house for he has paid a visit there, and behold the glory of his presence shone like a sun with tenfold power. It blasted thy wife and children and set fire to thy dwelling, and now they are but ashes. It was as if he were a god;" and the captain laughed aloud at his own picture, for he was of the party of those that hated me.

I longed to seize him by the throat and choke him, but that I could not do and so I answered:

"If that is so then are my family with the gods? It is a glorious thing to be with them, would I were there now also. I thank the king."

"Thy prayer is like to be soon answered," he replied, "for the king would shine upon thee also. Thy days are numbered and thy sun is setting."

"So be it; cease thy babble and lead me to the king!"

He looked at me and laughed again, then wheeled his men, and with a soldier on each side of me to prevent me escaping, we marched back to Mercia. My guards were softened by my plight, and though I did not ask it of them they told me the story of what had happened since my departure.

On the day after I left home Penda's spies reported that the king's mother and my sister, his wife, were in my house. Taking with him that lord to whose wife Acha had whispered the secret of Wulfhere's birth, he entered my door quietly. Cyneswithe and the queen-mother were there and with them Acha my wife and Eowa my son. Cyneswithe's hand was on the shoulder of my son. She withdrew it quickly as Penda entered and all rose up in some confusion.

He looked on them a while with his fierce eyes.

"Be seated, wife," he said. "Be seated, my mother. And thou, wife of Edbert my faithful servant, be seated also. Now let me tell you the object of my visit. I came to ask some questions of you all, and I will have right answers, else by the life of Woden ye shall suffer! Cyneswithe, wife, why comest thou so often to this house to fondle Edbert's children?"

"I fondle them not, King, but if I do are they not Edbert's children, who is my brother? Is it forbidden to a sister to love her brother?"

"A sister may, it is true, as far as is becoming, but how sayest thou, my mother, shall the mother of the king also love Edbert and pay him frequent visits and his children?"

Burgenhild drew herself up proudly and looked into the face of the king.

"What injustice is this, Penda?" she demanded. "Shall the mother of a king live alone and without friends? What harm for me to come hither with thy wife, my daughter? 'Tis cruel injustice for thee to put such a question."

"Rise up, Acha," Penda said quietly. "I would ask thee too a question."

The woman rose, trembling with fear.

"How many sons hast thou?" he demanded.

"Three daughters and two sons," she answered.

"And this lad here, whose son is he?"

"He is mine, King, my second son."

"Thy second son sayest thou? Where, then, is thy first?"

"With his father, Lord King."

"Why went he with his father?"

"I know not, King, except it be that Edbert bade him go."

"And why did he bid him go?"

"I know not."

"Be careful, woman, I will have the truth. Now answer me this question. Thou callest thy son Wulfhere; how looketh he?"

"He is tall, King, a great lad and strong."

"Even like his father, eh, is it not so?"

"Nay, King, not like Edbert."

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"Then he is like his mother Acha, with locks dark as the raven's wing, and face dark also?"

"Nay, King, he is very fair, he looks not like his mother."

"Now here is a great marvel," and Penda turned to his wife and mother. "Here is a lad whose father is Edbert and his mother Acha, yet in no way does he resemble either. Was it ever heard since the world began that a son failed to resemble either father or mother? Art sure he is no foundling, Acha, smuggled by Edbert into thy bed unknown to thee?"

The woman gave a gasp that Penda did not fail to see.

"I know that I was delivered of a child, great King, and Wulfhere was the babe I found at my side when my delivery was over," she stammered.

"Osric, come forward." Penda beckoned to his thane.

Now Acha knew that all was lost when she saw Osric there, for was it not to Osric's wife she had told her suspicions?

"Answer me this, Acha, wife of Edbert!" Penda roared. "What man in Mercia does thy son Wulfhere then most resemble?"

She turned and hid her eyes with her hands and wept aloud but would not answer. He seized her arm and dug his fingers into the flesh until she cried for mercy.

"Answer me, woman!" he shouted.

"Like the king—he looks like thee!" she wailed.

"What woman looks he like?"

"The queen, Cyneswithe!"

He let go her arm and she fell sobbing to the floor.

"Osric, come, tell thy tale," he ordered.

The thane stood forward and told what Acha had told his wife; how that the child she was delivered of was dead, moreover he was small and dark; how Edbert took him to lay him on the altar of the gods, then brought him back alive, and large and fair; how she suspected from the first that this was not her son, and that her suspicions were strengthened when she saw that this was just such a child as Penda and Cyneswithe might have for he looked like both; and, moreover, had not the queen been delivered the same night of a child whom Edbert said he slew; how the queen and queen-mother made frequent visits to Edbert's house, and fondled Wulfhere and kissed him, but paid little heed to Acha's children. He told all that Acha had said and it was much, then ended.

"Thou hearest him, woman!" Penda thundered to the form on the floor. "Is this all true?"

"Mercy, O King! It is true—it is true!" she wailed.

He turned to Burgenhild his mother.

"And what sayest thou?"

Now the queen-mother rose up from the couch on which she had been sitting. She knew this meant death to her, but her whole soul stirred in revolt against the base injustice of it all. She shook her finger at the king, her proud eyes flashed as she cried:

"Penda, thou monster and murderer of thy children, I would the gods had blasted me with the fire of their breath ere ever I brought thee into the world to curse it like a plague! Thou infamous coward and slayer of helpless women and children! Thou murderer! May the everlasting gods curse thee with——"

The king seized one of my spears that was standing in a corner of the room—my favorite javelin, the very one that was destined to avenge this crime—and plunged it into his mother's body.

She stood for a moment looking upon him.

"As I die, so shalt thou die also, Penda the wicked!"

She sank in a heap upon the floor—dead. Acha ran screeching toward the door, but Osric plunged his sword into her back, and Penda slew my son Eowa. They set fire to my house, and all my servants and my three daughters who tried to escape, they killed and cast their bodies into the flames. Then Penda ordered that none go near the ruin on pain of death. Such was the soldier's story.

Thus did Penda to me, and only Ostryth and Elflaeda were left of all my family, and they were far away in another land where it was more than likely I should never see them more. I was alone.

Didst ever have a sorrow like to mine, lords? If so ye know how I felt. No tear came to my eye. I could have sung as easily as I could have wept. My heart was numbed, it had no feeling in it. My wife was dead and all my children save Elflaeda. Ha! What did I care? "Halloo! Hoolla!" I was being led before the king to torture and to death. What did I care?

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"Come," I said to the soldier at my right, "come let us dance a measure, and thou, fellow"—addressing the one at my left—"fiddle me a tune upon thy sword."

I SEIZED the soldier by the waist and dragged him about in a wild dance while the rest looked on, some in pity, some laughing as if their sides would burst. I kicked in the air and I bowed and capered. I called the soldier my fair lady, and at the end of every measure I planted kisses on his beard, and hugged him like a bear. I shouted and sang.

They cheered me on and clapped their hands, laughing boisterously the while, and all the way to Penda's town I played the fool before them—for I was mad. They cast me into a cell in the tower where my senses came again to me, and I knew that I had been mad. A thought came to me.

Why not feign madness before Penda? He would not kill a madman, that I knew. The mad, all heathen believe, are under the protection of the gods. It was my only chance for life, and though for my own sake I cared nothing to live, yet my whole soul was bitter against Penda, and I longed to live only to avenge my wrongs upon him.

In the morning they brought me in before the king, He dismissed those that brought me, saying he would talk with me in private. The captain whispered something to him. He answered—

"No matter; leave me with him."

I made my bow to the king and stood before him.

"So, Edbert, thou hast returned," he said.

"It seems so, King, else were I not Edbert," I answered. "If I who stand here before thee am not Edbert, then who in Tiw am I who stand here? Answer me that."

"Edbert, my friend," he said, and his deep eyes sought to pierce into my very soul, "I counsel thee let not thy tongue run away from thee lest I cause thy head to follow after it."

"Then would my head come to its own again, O, King, for Edbert's head was ever quicker than his tongue."

"I'll warrant that is true, Edbert, for fox thou ever wert. They tell me thou art mad, but look thou, Edbert, mad or sane to talk as thou art talking thou art not far from a fool——"

"Not far, O King," I said, as I measured the distance separating us with my eye.

He looked at me uncertain whether to be angry or to laugh. At last he burst into a loud guffaw.

"Thou art a merry devil, Edbert; we will see if thou art merry anon. Methinks I will make thee my court fool. I have never had one hitherto."

"There was no need," I said boldly.

"How sirrah! What meanest thou?"

"I mean that in a court where all are fools, a wise man is needed, not a fool. Make me thy wise man, Penda."

"I am minded of a saying, 'The fool believes he is a wise man——'"

"'And the wise man knows himself to be a fool,'" I finished the saying for him. "To go by that saying 'twere hard to escape being a fool, for if the fool is a fool and the wise man knows himself to be a fool, what shall we say of the man who does not know he is a fool? Even that he is a fool also, for had he been a wise man he would have known he was a fool, but not knowing this he is not a wise man, ergo he is a fool."

"Ha! give me some more like that, my friend."

"Canst prove, King Penda, that the man who drinks least drinks most?"

"Nay, let me hear thee do it, Sir Wise-Man."

"The man who drinks least is most thirsty."

"True."

"The man who is most thirsty drinks most."

"That is probably true also."

"Ergo the man who drinks least drinks most."

"Edbert, wisdom dwelleth not in the bosom of fools. Thou art too wise to be a fool."

"Let me dispute that with thee, King—" I began.

"Nay, we will dispute it later," he interrupted. "Now tell me of the business thou didst have in hand among the Magesetas."

"Oh, the business went well enough," I answered.

"Well enough, eh! And were they all fools in Coel's court too?"

"All fools but me."

He looked long at me, and now I could see he was in doubt about my sanity. No one would dare to talk to him like that who was not mad. Sorrows often drive

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men mad he knew, and mine were heavy enough to do the same for me.

"Edbert, hast heard of the misfortune that visited thy house while thou wert absent?" he asked.

"Aye, I have heard, Lord King."

"Thy wife and children dead, all dead?"

"What of it, King? It may be I can get me more."

"Hearken, Edbert, to what I say," he continued. "Before Acha thy wife died she confessed that thou and thy sister Cyneswithe and my mother, put a child of mine whom I bade thee slay into her bed, and that that son grew up as thine and hers."

"She was ever a babbler, King, and given to imagining vain things," I said, almost forgetting as I said it the part I had to play.

"A sensible remark enough, friend Edbert," he replied, "whether it be true or false, but answer me this as sensibly—where is thy son Wulfhere?"

"Dead, King, stone dead. A bear as big as a house slew him and swallowed him at one gulp."

"Did it so, friend? But tell me now, whose son was this Wulfhere? There are those who say he was the very image of the king."

"I ever held him to be mine, Lord Penda, blood of my blood and bone of my bone, but come to think of it he did look much like thee. He had thy form, thy strength, thy haughty swagger. I never did quite trust Acha my wife. Say, King, didst ever visit her during my absence? Thou naughty, naughty Penda!" And I pointed my finger at him and laughed like an insane fool.

"Edbert, didst wash thy hands before thou camest into my presence?" he asked. "Methinks I see dirt on thy fingers. Did not my servants give thee water to wash in this morning?"

Now I knew what was coming for I had seen the great brass caldron on the glowing coals of the hearth, boiling and bubbling, and sending up great clouds of steam.

"Come, Edbert," he said as he moved over toward the fire; "see, I have prepared a basin for thee to wash in. Roll up thy sleeves and plunge thy arm in."

"But, King, it is too hot!" I cried.

"Nay, nay, believe me, 'tis ice-cold," he said. "See how the mist ascends, and look how the snow gathers upon the surface of the water."

"'Tis steam and boiling froth, King!"

"Nay, nay, believe me, it is mist and snow—white snow. Come, wash, thou fool!"

I came close to the caldron and rolled up the sleeve of my left arm. My blood ran cold at the thought of the torture I must endure. How could I play the fool still with my left arm in that pot? It was his purpose to discover if my madness were feigned or real, and if I would still deny or confess the truth of Acha's story. I prayed the gods to help me and plunged my arm above the elbow into the steaming water, and churned it around there, for I must needs still keep up the fool-play and make it seem the water hurt me not.

"Now hold it there, Edbert, till I bid thee draw it out," he ordered.

For a moment or two I felt no pain, and then the heat began to eat into my flesh, and the pain was nigh unbearable. I could have cried out in my agony, but using all the force I could command I showed no sign upon my face, for I knew the tyrant watched me closely.

"Swear now, Edbert," he commanded, "swear by the immortal gods Wulfhere was not my son, and that no other son of mine was brought up in thy house!"

"I swear it, King, I swear it by the gods!"

He looked at me perhaps for half a minute, trying to detect some signs of pain upon my features, then made a motion with his hand.

"Draw out thy arm," he said. "I see that thou art innocent—thy hands are clean. Thou hast not failed to stand the test. Edbert, my friend, freely do I forgive thee. Get back thy wits as soon as possible, for I need thy counsel. The gods have declared thee innocent. It is enough, now go!"

CHAPTER XIII

HOW EDBERT VISITED HIS HOME AND WHAT HE FOUND THERE

WITHOUT a word or any salutation I passed out of the room. Slowly as if I cared not for the pain I went from door to door till I reached the gate. Then when I saw that none could see I rushed away in the direction of my now desolate dwelling. The agony of my arm

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was terrible, for the flesh was cooked well nigh to the very bone. Behold it, lords, no witch's arm was e'er so withered. Somehow I found a storehouse, and groping around for flour I secured some, and bound my arm up in it with a cloth. This gave me some relief.

I passed on to my home. It was on a hill across a ravine from Penda's, and just on the outskirts of the town. I turned a corner of the path that brought my dwelling into view. Alas, it was a crumbled heap of blackened ruins. I made my way into the wreck of what was once my home. I stumbled over something at the doorway. I thought at first it was a tangle of sticks. I turned to see. It was a charred and blackened skeleton. A golden bracelet hung about a bony arm. My God, it was my wife!

Some twenty years before I had placed that armlet there with my own hands on the day that we were wed. I knelt beside those bones and took them in my arms, and planted kisses on the grinning skull. She had done me a great wrong, but her punishment was greater than the wrong she did me. Now I remembered only the day she was made my bride—a beautiful sweet maid she was—and my love for her returned with a rush that almost overwhelmed me. She had loved me in those days with all her soul, but I had neglected her for Ostryth whom I loved better than her, and the long years of this neglect had turned her jealous nature sour, until at last I do believe she grew to hate me. Ah, lords, I do beseech you, if you value your peace of mind and conscience and the happiness of your house, take but one wife. Cleave to her and love her, neglect her not; for if you do neglect her the day will come perchance as it did come for me, when Conscience like a prophet from the dead will rise up to rebuke you and sting you with poisoned darts. Who broke his sweet bride's heart? Who werecked her gentle nature? Who murdered her immortal soul? These are the questions Conscience asks of me continually, and like a judge pronouncing sentence on me it cries unceasingly—

"Thou art the man!"

I found my children's bones there too. Ah me, forgotten was the agony of my poor arm as I stood and gazed upon them in my sorrow. Nearby I found my favorite spear uninjured by the fire, and as I leaned upon it I prayed my heathen gods to give me strength and courage to plunge it into Penda's body, to avenge me and mine upon him for all this evil he had brought on us. As I prayed I must have slept or fainted, for a vision came to me that gave much comfort. I saw the king as it seemed fighting in battle. He smote down all who came before him and they were many, and he seemed to fight alone against a host. Myself was there among his adversaries and in my hand a spear.

"Ha, Edbert, art thou too against me!" I heard him cry as he slew a great warrior who just then attacked him.

"Here is a message, Penda, from the dead of Edbert's house!" I shrieked at him, and hurled my javelin.

It pierced his beard and caught him in the throat. His hands went up as if to pluck the spear out. He staggered, then fell backward to the earth. His body writhed a moment, then lay still. This was the vision that I saw, and I knew that the old prophecy of my nurse long years before would be fulfilled.

When I woke from my dream I found myself lying among the ashes. The stars were shining in the sky, and I knew I must have lain there long. Something moved near me.

"Who is there?" I asked.

"Edbert, it is Cyneswithe, thy sister. Hush! I am come to speak with thee."

"I thought he had slain thee also, sister," I said.

"Nay, he has spared me for a while, how long I know not," she answered. "Tell me now, Edbert, of my son Wulfhere. Is he indeed dead as I have been told?"

"Aye, sister, slain by the bear."

"Ah, cruel brother " she sobbed. "Didst thou turn coward when the bear went up against him? Where wert thou, Edbert, when my son was slain? Alack, that ten men and my own brother should stand idly by and see my dear son killed!"

My heart turned hard against her. Had I not lost more children than she had? Were not my sorrows more than hers? To think that from my own sister in this my hour of agony there should come only rebuke and blame.

"Woman," I said harshly, "we did all that was possible to save Wulfhere, but he is dead; what need then to rebuke me further?"

"Tell me the story," she pleaded.

I told her all that happened, she asking

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many questions through her tears as I went on.

"Maybe he is not dead, Edbert, was he not strong and brave? It may be that as he was dragged away he recovered from the blow and slew the bear. Or perchance some one rescued him. I can not think Wulfhere is dead."

"I know not, sister," I replied, "but I have no hope he is alive. Tell me now what does the king intend concerning me? I have a thought to leave this land and go where my wife and daughter are."

"Nay, go not," she said quickly. "Penda will do thee no further harm. The people are mad against him for the murder of his mother. He knows that none can counsel him as thou canst in his great difficulty. He is determined to make amends to thee for all his cruelty, and give thee gifts and advance thee to great honor. He hopes by this to win thee to his side, for thy wisdom is more to him than a regiment."

"Then will I stay, Cyneswithe, but not for the honors." And I told her of my vision, and my hopes of revenge.

She listened quietly.

"Yea, stay, the gods will help thee," she said.

Then she rose up and was gone.

I too arose and went to a friend's house, where I doctored up my arm as best I could. While there a messenger came to summon me to the king. I went into his presence and found him very gentle.

"Thy madness is passed away, Edbert?" he asked.

"It is gone, King," I said.

"And thy arm, what of it "

"'Tis better."

"Edbert, I repent me of this sorrow I have caused thee, and would make amends."

"Speak not of it," I answered.

He bade me go through the land and choose what wives I would. Also he gave me one of his own castles in a neighboring town with many servants and much gold and silver. I chose one maiden for a wife, the fairest I could find, but I had no children by her, nor did I love her. I lived for but one thing—revenge.

CHAPTER XIV

EANHERE THE BEAR TELLS HIS TALE

NOW let me tell you of Wulfhere. When the bear smote him and he lay upon the ground he was not dead but stunned from the blow. The beast seized him as it happened by the belt, and dragged him far back into the hills. More than once his senses came to him, but when he struggled to free himself the fierce shaking the bear gave him caused him to faint again. How long he was dragged onward he knew not, but at last the bear dropped him. The sudden jolt awoke him, and looking up he saw a most strange sight.

Above him, standing upright, was the bear, growling and snarling as bears do when brought to bay and when their wrath is mixed with fear. About ten paces from them and rushing straight upon them was a strange being, a man clad in an immense bear-skin, white and brown. The skin was hooked about his body, and the head with the upper jaw and teeth rested like a helm upon his head. Only his face and hands and feet were visible. He seemed to be armed with no weapon save a long-pointed dagger. Straight at the bear he rushed; then dodging the blow aimed at him he thrust the knife deep into the great brute's throat.

Down both went to the ground rolling over and over in a wrestle of death. Wulfhere tried hard to rise to go to the stranger's aid, but his limbs failed him because of the mangling the bear had given him, and he once more fell back in a faint. But before his swoon he saw a strange thing happen. Out from the woods on every side rushed huge bears brown and white. The woods seemed full of them. They paid no heed to him but went straight for the fight. He saw them hurl themselves upon the fighters, and then his senses left him and he knew no more.

When he came to he thought to see the stranger torn in pieces and himself in great danger of the same fate; instead he found himself in a rude hut. There was but one window in the hut, a window and a door. The door was closed, but by the light from the window he could see his surroundings. He lay on a couch of straw covered with bear-skins. Another similar bed he saw across the room. Hanging from the walls were weapons of different sorts, and Wulfhere saw they were all large and heavy.

Two-handed swords, great javelins, and bows with quivers full of arrows, daggers and skinning knives, and two huge battle-axes double-headed with straight-edged blades and painted red unlike any axes he had ever seen. Nailed to the walls were heads of stags and wolves, trophies perhaps

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of the hunter who owned the hut. On all sides hung huge brown and white bear-skins. They lined the walls, they carpeted the floor, they hung as curtains about the door and window; always they were brown and white.

Wulfhere wondered, for never had he seen bears of such color till that one that struck him down appeared before him, and now all the skins in the place seemed of the same kind. He lay there long in thought. The memory of the bear that fought at Penda's sports in Meadswell—the bear the stranger had befriended—came back to him, and he wondered if he had come by chance to the home of that strange being. He heard a rustle at the door, the curtain swung aside and the very man on whom his thoughts were resting stood before him. A glad smile played on his face as he saw Wulfhere sit up in bed.

"Ha, boy, so thou'rt alive again!" he cried.

"Alive but nearly dead of hunger," Wulfhere answered.

"Good! It is long since thou hast eaten."

"How? 'Twas only yesterday that I came hither."

The stranger laughed a merry laugh.

"Nay, friend, twice eight days have come and gone since then. In all that time thou hast taken nothing—only a little milk or water. I had to pour them down thy throat. Look at thy arms and breast."

Wulfhere did as he was directed. He found his arms wasted and withered with his long fast; his chest and thigh were scarred with wounds now almost all healed over. Terrible had been the mangling of the bear.

"Old Black-Tooth nearly did for thee, my man. A good meal he'd have made of thee had I not come along in time—I and my regiment."

"Hast thou a regiment then?" Wulfhere asked in surprize. "When thou wert rolling over with the bear I thought I saw the woods swarming with great beasts that seemed to throw themselves upon thee. How didst escape them, friend, or was that but a dream of my disordered senses?"

The stranger laughed aloud.

"Nay, nay," he said. "They were my regiment come to succor me. They made short work of Black-Tooth."

"How thy regiment—what meanest thou?" Wulfhere asked.

"Thou must eat first, boy; then I will tell thee."

He went out of the hut, and soon Wulfhere smelled venison boiling on the fire. In a few minutes the stranger entered with a bowl of vension broth, steaming hot, and laid it on the table by the bed. Wulfhere devoured it like a famished man, then handed back the empty bowl.

"Good, give me more!" he said.

"No more for now, 'twill do thee harm to take too much at first. An hour hence and I will give thee something else."

A jug of water stood on the table. Wulfhere drank deep of this, then laid himself back on his pillow and slept. All afternoon he slept, and far into the morning. The sun was high when he awoke. The stranger heard him stir and entered bearing food. When Wulfhere had eaten he thanked his rescuer for the meal.

"Let me now thank thee too for my deliverance," he said. "It is thy doing that I live to-day."

"Say naught of it, lad, we are but quits, for did not thy aid save me two Summers ago at the spring? It may be I would have let thee perish had I not recognized thee. Moreover I recognized the bear."

"The bear?"

"Aye, but that is only part of a long story I will tell thee when thou art stronger. What art thou called among thy people, lad?" he asked.

"Wulfhere."

"Strange, but I had a dream some years ago, and in the dream one called by that name came to me here among the mountains. He was Wulfhere, the son of Penda, and we became blood-brothers in my dream."

"My name is Wulfhere, but Penda is not my sire. My father's name is Edbert and my mother's Acha."

"Thou lookest much like Penda, friend, and my dreams do not often deceive me; yet thou shouldst know thy parents. Tell me thy story, Wulfhere."

THERE was not much to tell and Wulfhere told him all in few words. He thought of the sorrow that would come upon his sister and his father at his loss, and his heart was very sad as he told of his great love for them.

"And now, my friend, I wait to hear thy story. But tell me first thy name."

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"My name is Eanhere, 'Eanhere the Bear' men call me," replied the stranger. "Hearken now and I will tell thee something of my life. I came from Hwicceland, and my tribe was the tribe of the Hwiccas. My father was king of that people, brother's son to Ceulin the West Saxon who overcame the Hwiccans years ago, and I was his eldest son. He was head of that people not by birth and race, for he belonged to the West Saxons, but by conquest. And so it came that he had many enemies and ruled only through fear.

"One day my father took another wife, a young maid and a fair, the daughter of a great lord of the tribe. I was just grown a man then, and smelled a plot when I saw how freely that lord gave up his daughter, and how freely she came. He was, I knew, a deadly enemy of the king. That night my father took her to his bed, but while he slept she stole out in her shift, and finding a knife she came back to the room and plunged it in his breast.

"He cried out as he woke, and I, who slept in the next room—I had moved thither because of my suspicions—leaped from my couch and rushed to his door. I met the girl as she fled half-naked, and dragged her to my father's bedside. I found him gasping for his breath, and trying hard to wrench out the knife that was buried in his side up to the hilt.

" 'My father,' I cried, 'was it this girl did this deed?' And I pushed her forward to the light.

" 'Aye it was she, my son,' he gasped.

"Now I looked at the girl as she stood in the full blaze of the torch. She looked ashamed of her half-naked state and she tried to pull her scanty shift about her breasts, but her head was raised in pride, and her splendid eyes flashed bold defiance at me, as if she dared me to do my worst. Her fearlessness and beauty well nigh unnerved me, but one look at the bed where her victim struggled for his breath decided me. I seized my sword and drove it through her body, then drew near to the king.

" 'Son, this girl was but the instrument of Dyfed and his followers. See, I die but let me not die unavenged. My curse upon thee if thou slay not these men! Fly from this place, thou canst do nothing now. Fly, and return when thou art ready.'

"I took the hand he held out to me, and swore as he bade me.

" 'It is well,' he said, and fell back with a groan and died.

"I took the body of the girl up in my arms and carried it from the room and through the passageway into the great hall. The place was ablaze with torches, and many men were gathered there. Among them I saw the father of the girl, and other lords who had conspired with him.

" 'Come, Dyfed, take thy daughter back!' I cried. 'My father hath no further use for her.' And I flung the body down at Dyfed's feet.

" 'Death to the Saxon dog!' they cried on every side as they rushed upon me.

"I warded off the blow that Dyfed aimed at me, and ran my sword into his throat. I smote the sword-arm from the next man as he came, then dodging through the rest I dashed out of the hall into the night. They tried to follow with their torches burning, but I was swift, the swiftest man in Hwicce, and soon they gave up the chase for I was far away."

"Some day I'll try a run with thee," said Wulfhere.

"When thou art well thou shalt have many a run with me, I trust, but not for many days yet. All night I fled, and all next day, getting a bite of food here and there as I went. Four days I fled, and on the fourth night came to a hut far back in the hills, a lonely, desolate place, and knocked at the door. A hermit with a torch in his hand, an old man with a long white beard, opened to me.

" 'Who art thou and why comest thou hither?' he asked.

" 'Give me food and shelter for the night,' I said.

" 'Come in, my son,' he replied. 'Such as I have I freely give thee.'

"He bade me lie upon his bed for he saw that I was weary, while he went to get water from the spring. He poured me out a horn of it from his pitcher, then brought me in a slice of cold cooked meat. I had had nothing since the morning and ate ravenously.

" 'Sleep now, my son,' he said, 'for thou art weary.'

"I laid my head down on the couch and soon was fast asleep. Once when I woke up in the night I thought I heard the distant growl of wild beasts foraging in the mountains, and once when my eyes opened I saw the old man bending over me, a light in his hand and a strange look in his face."

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CHAPTER XV

THE HERMIT TELLS THE TALE OF HIS LOST SON, OSRED

"IN THE morning I woke early, and going down to the spring I drank and washed, then ate with the hermit at his homely board.

" 'Son, why comest thou here to this fearsome place?' he asked. 'It is a place that few men visit.'

" 'Why do they not?' I asked.

" 'Because the mountain yonder'—and he pointed over his shoulder—'is haunted by strange beasts which they say are men enchanted. Didst thou not hear the sound of them last night?'

" 'Aye, I did hear strange growlings,' I replied.

" 'It was the beasts,' he said; 'wouldst hear the story of them?'

"I answered, 'Aye,' and the old man told me a tale that filled me with great wonder as it will no doubt thee, Wulfhere.

" 'When I came here a score of years ago,' he began, 'I found an old man dying in this hut—Thorkell, his name. He was not of our race, but had come from the Northland, from far over the great water. This was many, many years ago. With him he brought a great bear, white it was, white as the snow, bigger than any bears of this land, with long neck and legs. Helsingaland had been its home and his. The bear was very tame with him but fierce toward others. He called it by his brother's name, for he said his brother's spirit lived within it. He caught a brown bear here and mated it with his, and from these two sprang many, all of them brown and white.

" 'As the years went by they multiplied till they became a great herd, and himself, now an old man and feeble, was unable to rule them. They had grown very fierce and ofttimes threatened his life, till he began to feel that he somehow must get away from them. One day a strong man appeared before his door. How he reached that hut back in the hills without being fallen upon by the bears the old man knew not, but there he stood. He was very tall of stature, a huge man, and his only weapon was a mighty sword.

" 'The old man saw his sword was red with blood, and the stranger told him he had slain a bear that had opposed him. Soon Thorkell had told the man all his story and how he wished to leave that place and die in peace away from his fierce brethren for he was old and sick.

" ' "How can I aid thee?" the stranger asked him.

" ' "See, I will garb thee in a bearskin," Thorkell said. 'It is such as I wear among them; perchance they will respect thee in it."

" 'He took down from the wall of the hut a great bearskin, brown and white, and hooked it about the stalwart form of the young stranger. He told him words of the tongue he used to the bears. He gave him too a great ax unlike any he had seen before, and hung it to the belt he fastened over the bearskin, then put a light club into his hand. In the same kind of garb he clad himself, and hung to his belt an ax just like the other, and took also a club.

" ' "Come, I will call my people," he said. "They live in the caves yonder across the stream. Perchance the two of us can get back the power over them that is fast slipping from my hands; then in time thou canst get me away."

" 'Together they went out of the hut and stood on a rock overlooking the ravine in which was the stream, and in plain view of the caves on the other side. The old man gave the bear-call through his hands. Soon he was answered from the caves, and dark forms were seen to emerge and make for the stream. In a little time they were surrounded on all sides by the monsters, and one great fellow came up snarling close to the stranger, and bared his teeth. The old man ordered him back. He only answered with a growl.

" 'Thorkell brought his club down on the bear's head. With a snarl the beast sprang toward him. He slipped on a stone and fell backward as the great brute reached him. The young man swung his ax and brought it down on the animal's skull. The bear toppled over, gave a few kicks, and died. Great then was the commotion among the bears. Snarling and growling they came closer and closer.

" 'The stranger, using the words and actions the old man had taught him, rushed in among them smiting the more forward ones on the snout with his club till they cowered and drew back from him. They had found their master. Thorkell was now on his feet. He waved his club in the direction of the caves, barked out

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an order to them, and sullenly they all withdrew.

" ' "I thank thee, my son, thou hast saved my life," he said. "Not that I care now for my life, but I would die in peace upon my bed and be buried in the ground, not in the bodies of my people. Come now, let us go back to the hut, for I would talk with thee."

" 'Together they went to the house and talked far into the night. The old man told the younger all he had to tell about his bears, how they looked to him to lead them out to hunt for game, how he had not done this for many days, because his heart had grown weak and his limbs feeble, and he could not longer keep up with their swift pace. This, he said, had been the cause largely of their rebellion. Had he not brought them up as children? The traps he set, the holes he had dug in the deers' runways, these things and many others he had contrived to make the catching of game easy for them. The bears had become many, the game scarce, and they had now to hunt very far afield, too far for him to go.

" ' "I must depart from them," he said, "and would have done so several moons ago when I first felt my weakness coming on, but I loved my children and would not leave them here unshepherded. Yet I must do it now."

" ' "I am minded to take thy place for a season," the young man said. "What sayest thou to that?"

" ' "Do so, my son, and I will bless thee," Thorkell answered.

" 'And so they talked, then slept, and in the morning talked again. Next night they called the bears together and had a run with them. When the old man grew weary the young man helped him on. Always they kept ahead of the beasts as was expected of them, and it was their axes that brought down the stag they caught. Leaving the bears to feast upon the carcass, they slipped away, and traveling many miles they came at last to this poor hut. The young man left the old man here and then went back to the mountains.

" 'It was in journeying through the land to find my son whom I had lost that I chanced upon this place and found old Thorkell dying. This was the tale he told, and when he died I buried him according to his prayer. Here I have stayed,' said the hermit, 'these many, many years, and here I wait for that poor son who strayed away from me, and who, I do believe, is up there in those mountains. Night after night when the moon is up I go to yonder rock, and there securely hidden I wait and watch for the hunting of the bear-man and his hounds.

" 'Many a time have I seen them pounding by, and in their lead a great man clothed in a bearskin. I think he is my son whom I have lost, but when I try to cry out to him fear ties my tongue and I am dumb. 'Tis long since they have hunted here, but I have heard the bear-howls frequently of late; it may be they will pass here any night, now. Wouldst witness them, my son?' he asked.

" 'Aye, that I would,' said I.

"That night we watched but saw nothing. Another night we waited but we heard no sound. Four nights in all we watched, and on the fourth we heard the bear-howls far off in the distance, and above them the voice as of a man cheering them on.

" 'Now hearken, son, they come!'

"LOUDER and louder grew the growlings; we could hear the dead branches crack as the beasts rushed over them. Suddenly not ten feet away from us a great stag bounded past and there was terror in his eyes. Ten minutes later into the open came the pursuers. In their lead was a tall man clad in a bearskin, and in his hand a great red ax. He came within seven paces of our very eyes. I felt the old man grip me hard.

"After the leader came the bears. I tried to count them in the moonlight. I numbered fivescore and then got my numbers mixed; there must have been that many more. With many a bark and growl and wild halloo they passed until we lost the sound of them far down the valley. The hermit could hardly speak so excited was he. I carried him back to the hut, he all the while repeating:

" 'My son! My long lost son!'

"When he was calm at last he told me that never had he seen the bear-man so near before. He knew now that it was his son Osred. That night I told him I would go and find his son and bring him to him. He tried to persuade me not to go, saying that the mountains were bewitched and that only death would reach me there,

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but all the while I knew that he was hoping I would go. When he saw I was resolved he took his bearskin which Thorkell had left in the hut, and hooked it about me.

"This ax also he hung at my belt and with tears in his old eyes he blessed me and let me go. I went and after much walking and climbing I reached this hut. It was in the afternoon I reached it, and as I walked toward it I saw the door open, and a great man clad as I was clad and with an ax like mine in his hand came toward me. What need to tell thee more, Wulfhere?

"When we had hunted for a week together and he had shown me how to rule his bears, then swore I to take his place among his children, as he called them, and never to leave them till another was ready to relieve me of the charge. One morning early when the bears were asleep in their dens, we slipped away to the little hut in the valley where the old man, Osred's father, dwelt. When we reached the door Osred bade me farewell. I pushed it open, and seeing the old man within I cried—

" 'See, I have brought thee thy son!'

"I waited long enough to see the two locked in each others arms, then turned and fled back to this place."

This was the tale Eanhere told. Three days later he said to Wulfhere—"Come now to the rock, my friend, and I will show thee the hermit's hut and all the country round about."

Together they climbed the rock, Eanhere helping Wulfhere in the steep places, for he was still very weak. The bear-man pointed out the hut—a dark spot among the green foliage of the far-off valley—and the path he took to reach it.

"Lives the old man there still, and his son?" Wulfhere asked.

"Nay," answered Eanhere, "for a fortnight after when I called there I found no trace of them. Osred had told me that he would away back to his people with his father. No doubt they are in their own land now."

"See, there is the country of the Mercians," he continued, pointing with his ax. "In that direction lies the land of Edwin, King of Northumbria. There to the west is the land of Cadwallo, King of the Britons whom the Angles call Cedwal. Far off to the east the East Angles live."

Wulfhere gazed long upon the scene that lay before him, then, for the evening was now come, they descended the rock, laid them down on their beds and slept.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLOOD-BROTHERS

NOW four weeks passed, and Wulfhere and Eanhere sat by the fire in the hut after they had eaten.

"Come now, my friend," said Wulfhere, "is it in thy mind that we two should become blood-brothers?"

"Aye, it is," said Eanhere, "for thou art very close to me, and hast wound thy arms about my heart."

Both men stood up, and each, taking from his belt his dagger, sank the point into the flesh of his right arm just below the elbow; then holding their bared arms with the wounds pressed close together each repeated the oath.

"I, Eanhere, called the Bear, take thee Wulfhere Edbertsson to be my blood-brother. If I prove false to thee may the curse of Woden light upon me."

"I, Wulfhere, son of Edbert, take thee Eanhere to be my brother. I swear by Woden's beard I will be true to thee till death part us. So help me, all ye gods."

When they had sworn they gripped each other's hands and each gave to the other a ring, and each fastened his armlet above the elbow of the other. It was a solemn act that, lords, and ye will see how true each was to his vow.

"Art strong enough to take thy first run with the bears, my brother?" Eanhere asked a fortnight later.

"I am strong enough," Wulfhere answered. "I am impatient now to see thy hounds in the hunt."

They clad themselves in their fur coats and hung their axes to their wrists, then left the hut and stood upon the rock overlooking the valley of the caves. Eanhere put his hands to his mouth and gave the call, a succession of deep *wuffs* ending in a barking snarl. Twice he repeated it and from across the stream could be heard the answering *wuffs* of the bears as they came out of their dens.

Soon they were swimming the stream and climbing the ascent to the hut. They swarmed up the hill toward the two men. It was a fearsome sight to see, and Wulfhere grasped the handle of his ax to have it

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ready. He counted ninescore and three, all of them brown and white and larger far than any common bears. They fawned upon Eanhere and rubbed against him, then seeing Wulfhere some of them snarled and moved toward him.

"Stand still!" Eanhere shouted to his brother, then placing himself before his friend he drove the beasts back with many a blow.

It was some time before they would be friendly toward him, but they soon learned it was not their master's will that they should touch him, and in time he became as much to them as Eanhere was.

"Now, my children, we are all here and we are hungry. Halloo! Now let us hunt." Eanhere's face turned fierce like a bear's, and Wulfhere felt as if he too were a bear in human form.

"Wing thy feet now, my brother, for we hunt the fleet stag tonight. Away! Away, my people! Halloo, halloo!"

Eanhere dashed down the hill, Wulfhere close at his heels, and they heard the heavy pounding of the beasts as they ran in great bounds a few paces behind. Ah, the fierce joy of that run! Over rocks and streams they went, bounding as if on air. It scarce seemed to Wulfhere that he ever touched the ground. His feet had wings; so had his head. 'Twould be a fleet quarry that would get away from them that night. A crackle in the bushes by the stream and out dashed a splendid stag. He followed the path before them for there was more room for his broad antlers there, and he made for the plains to the left.

"Keep the bears on the path!" shouted Eanhere. "And I and Fleetfoot will turn the stag up the mountain."

Calling Fleetfoot, the fleetest of the bears, he struck off the path to the left, and intercepting the stag as he followed the winding pathway, drove him from it in the direction of the hills. To catch a stag on the open plain was more than bears or men could hope to do, but in the woods and up the rocky steep they had a chance. And now, spreading their army out so the deer could not double on them, the two men ran on together.

"We near the hill." Eanhere cried! "Come, let us see if thou canst run, my brother." And he dashed forward.

Wulfhere sprang after him. Nearer and nearer he drew till now he was but a pace behind, and now right at his brother's side. Do what he could Eanhere could not shake him off. Close at his side Wulfhere ran, then slowly drew ahead. Looking back he saw Eanhere panting with the great effort; himself, he felt no strain.

"Faster, my brother, faster," he laughed back, "I thought that thou couldst run."

"Thou runnest like a devil and no man," he heard Eanhere pant out.

The stag now began to take the rise. A bound and Wulfhere was at his side; a spring and he was on his back. Then snatching up his knife he leaned forward and drew it across the stag's throat. The poor beast pitched forward and fell struggling for breath.

Wulfhere looked behind and for a moment saw no signs of man or bears, then suddenly they burst into view and staggered up.

"Never man ran like thee, Wulfhere," Eanhere said; "thou art the swiftest man in England."

Wulfhere laughed aloud; then while his brother kept the bears away he cut a steak off from the stag, leaving the carcass to the bears, and soon only the bones were left. A score of deer in all fell to the axes that day before they quit the hunt.

THEY went back to the hut and roasted some of the venison on the fire, then talked, and slept. And so it came to pass, lords, that Wulfhere and Eanhere his blood-brother ruled over the bears, and led them many a moonlight night in chase of game. Sometimes they chased the wolves back far into the mountains, sometimes the mountain lion was their quarry, sometimes the deer. As yet never had the bears tasted the blood of men.

They grew to know and love Wulfhere so that even the fiercest was tame and gentle with him. Whatsoever these two brothers ordered, the bears performed. They were as children to these brethren.

Wulfhere soon began to love this free life in the mountains with his brother and his brute brethren. Ah, the fierce joy of the hunt! Never had he experienced such a joy. The blood went tingling through his veins like old wine, and he felt that man had no monopoly of the pleasure of earth, that it was good to be a bear at times. The fierce wild bear-look such as Eanhere had came also into Wulfhere's face when his brethren

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were about him, and ever after when in the battle that same look came upon his countenance, and men feared him as much for that grim look as for his mighty arm and his good sword.

And as Eanhere had promised years before, they went together to the towns about to take part in the warlike contests there, and clad in their bearskins, not hooked about them as when they hunted with the bears, but loosely thrown over their shoulders and held in place by belt and buckle. In all Hwicce they became known as the Bear-Brethren, and in Deira and Lindesey and along the borders of the Britons' land, and in Mercia and Wessex.

In all the contests there were none could stand before them, whether in ax or sword-fight, or in the race, or in any feats of skill or strength. They came, they conquered and they went their way again laden with their prizes of war. They spoke to none and few men spoke to them, but many whispered as they passed—

"Behold the Bear Brethren! Are they not fearsome men?"

They say that in those places where they visited, aye, and in lands where their feet never trod, mothers learned to warn their children against disobedience by threatening them that the Bear-Brethren would get them. By their own names the brethren were not known to others, but Eanhere was called sometimes "The Bear," sometimes "Blood Ax," from the color of his weapon; and Wulfhere they called "Strong Arm," and afterward when he had taken the sword of Wiglaf they called him "Great Sword" after the name of his weapon; but that is another story.

"Tell me the story of Black-Tooth, the bear that almost slew me," asked Wulfhere one day as the brothers sat together before their fire.

"The story is short," his friend responded, "and I will tell it very briefly. Black-Tooth was one of the biggest, perhaps the biggest of all the brethren. Very fierce he was too, and savage, so that more than once he attacked and almost slew some of his brothers. He knew his great strength, and so oppressed the others that they grew to hate and fear him. It happened on a day when he had quarreled with Fleetfoot, who was my favorite bear, and was engaged in worrying him to death, I rushed upon him with my club and smote him heavily upon the head.

"He turned on me with a savage growl, and because I had only my club with me and no ax or dagger he knocked me down and would have put an end to me had not Fleetfoot leaped on him and seized him by the throat. I crept out from beneath him and ran back to the hut to get my ax. I reached the bears again just in time to save Fleetfoot's life, for Black-Tooth had him down. He saw me coming and leaped from under my ax as it was raised above him, for it was my intention to kill him, and growling he ran into the woods.

"I followed him for many miles for my blood was up and I swore to kill him, but always he kept ahead of me on the rocky ground, nor would he turn and fight, because he feared Blood Ax. At last I could run no farther and the bear got away. I had sworn, however, to slay him, and that is why when I saw him standing over and about to finish thee I ran in with my knife and plunged it into his throat. He would have fled if he had had time for I saw fear written on his face, but as it was I gave him no time; moreover, my brethren were close behind me.

"There was not much of Black-Tooth left when we got through with him. He had found a mate, a brown bear, and had two cubs with him, which I slew. This is the story of Black-Tooth, and I know not if I would have risked my life with only a knife in my hand, if it had not been that I recognized him and had sworn to kill him."

"Well for me it was Black-Tooth," said Wulfhere.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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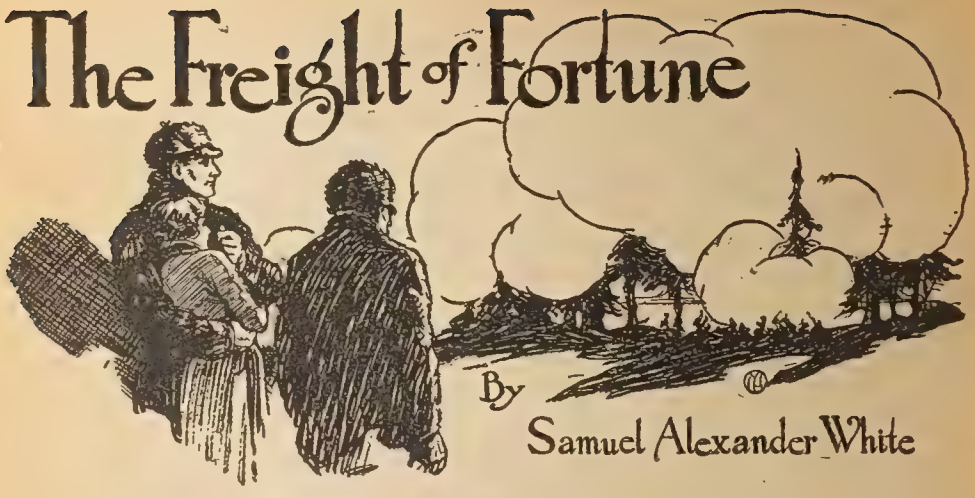
The Freight of Fortune



By Samuel Alexander White

"Author of Sunless Seas," "Blended Brigades," etc.

"TO THE corpse of the Little Company."

In Beaver Hall at Montreal Simon McTavish, otherwise known as "the Marquis" from his domineering attitude in the affairs of the Northwest Company, rose to his feet from the banquet board, his wine-glass in his hand, his bloodshot eye running round the assembled guests, the lords of the great Northwest Company, the representatives of the Little Company which had been absorbed by the larger concern, all gathered together in Northwest headquarters to ratify and celebrate the union of the two rival firms.

From the ends of the known wilderness they were gathered, from the far posts of the *Pays d'en Haut*, the High Country beyond the Northwesters' *entrepôt*, Grande Portage at Lake Superior's western end, fit breed of the North to drink life and death, love and hate, bright romance and dark intrigue. They had dined sumptuously, had drunk deeply, had toasted friend and foe from Lachine to Grande Portage, and now Simon McTavish capped all their toasts with his own.

"To the corpse of the Little Company," he proposed with gruesome finality.

In a body Northwesters and former Little Company men stood up with McTavish, their glasses poised, to discover the fact that they had left one person seated. He was an old man in the quiet dress of a Montreal merchant, his face brown and wrinkled, his head bald, his black eyes burning with a dim, far-away glow under his heavy gray eyebrows. Sunk low in his chair he sat, a picture of frailty, his thin hand stretched out on the table toward his untasted wine.

"Do you hear, Clément Beauchamp?" growled McTavish, guzzling down his wine. "The Little Company is dead. Long live the Northwest Company!"

"*Vive la compagnie du Nord-ouest!*" echoed the assemblage in a roar, and their wine went down with a sudden sluicing.

"I hear," nodded old Beauchamp, "but I do not agree. You may think the Little Company dead and buried but it will resurrect itself in the hearts of independent men.

"As a former Little Company man I came here tonight open to argument, but no argument that I have heard in your vituperation and abuse has persuaded me to join you. Because I never liked you nor your business methods I refused to join the Northwesters and stood with the Little Company, and now that the Little Company is absorbed I stand alone."

"You what?" roared McTavish, plunging round the table at the old man.

He was upon Beauchamp in an instant, wholly drunk and reckless of what he did, the heavy glass tumbler in his hand about to crash down on Beauchamp's bald head, when Dorchester, the spokesman of the

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Wintering partners from the *Pays d'en Haut,* caught his arm and bore him back.

"Sit down, Simon!" he cried. "You might as well hit a person on the head with a stone. That heavy glass would crack a skull, and we don't want murder done here in Beaver Hall. Sit down, I say. You're drunk as a fool."

McTAVISH, too far gone in his wine to comply with the advice of a friend, turned his anger on Dorchester, writhing and struggling and trying to brain him with the tumbler which he still retained. Dorchester caught his wrist, wrenching the missile away and dashing it to the floor.

It broke into a hundred fragments with a rifle-like report, and grinding the glass to powder the two men wrestled about the board, Dorchester smothering McTavish with his weight, appealing to him to be sane and receiving damnation all the while from McTavish's furious lips.

All Beaver Hall was in a bedlam. McTavish's cronies rushed to his aid, pulling him away from Dorchester, and the rest of the Wintering partners backed Dorchester so that the battle raged, East against West, Montreal members against the members from the *Pays d'en Haut.*

Wrestling, striking, stamping, the mob of banqueters raged about the hall. The table went down with a crash, linen, china, silver, viands and wine mingling in a sodden heap under men's heels. The trophies of the wild gathered from the West spun toppling from their stands and the very pictures and maps themselves were swept from the walls by the fighters' swaying backs.

Curiously enough amid all the destruction old Beauchamp's chair remained intact for a time. The table was gone from in front of him, his wine-glass spilled on the floor, the room in a whirlpool of which he formed the quiet center spot.

The spirit of frailty in all that orgy of brawn, he was the only object that did not receive punishment in some form, yet so violently did the eddies swing about him that he could not remain immune entirely. The rolling body of a thrown Northwester struck the legs of his chair, overturning it and throwing him down in the heap of débris.

Dorchester saw him go down. Despairing of quieting McTavish, he suddenly pushed Simon's figure from him and struck him a heavy blow on the jaw.

McTavish's drunken knees quivered, his clawing arms dropped, his face went blank and he pitched back senseless into the arms of his partners. Even as he fell Dorchester sprang away and helped Beauchamp to his feet, hurrying him to the doorway.

"Quick, Beauchamp!" he urged. "Get it open. I'll hold back the rush if necessary."

"Thanks, Dorchester," puffed the old man, fumbling for the lock. "I'll not forget your aid."

Dorchester, his huge six-foot frame shadowed monstrously on the wall behind him, whirled in front of the doorway to face any onset, but the fall of McTavish had a daunting effect on the Montreal partners. They crowded around him, raising him up and applying a sop of cold wine to his temples, so that the struggle relaxed and the Wintering partners who had backed their spokesman Dorchester had a chance to gather together with him at the doorway.

Old Beauchamp paused with his hand on the lock, he and Dorchester staring across the space of the dismantled room at the slowly reviving McTavish.

"Well, it seems I was in error, McTavish," chuckled the old man. "I do not stand altogether alone. Some of my antagonists in trade are still my friends in person.

"So tomorrow I proceed as I had planned. I take my independent venture to the West."

"You—you!" choked McTavish trembling in his anger and weakness. "You, Beauchamp! An old wraith like you? You had better sit at home in your little counting-house."

"I may be old, but I shall have the strength of youth behind me," Beauchamp reminded him. "My clerk Jean Boileau leads my *voyageurs,* and you can't pretend to call him old at twenty-four."

"No, he is young enough and fool enough," leered McTavish, a slow smile breaking over his battered face. "Jean Boileau is fool enough, I grant you that. I suppose he would risk his very neck for Cécile, that pretty daughter of yours? I have heard that he will marry her. Is

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that the price of Jean's success on this venture?"

"It is no business of yours what the price is," retorted Beauchamp, pushing wide the door. "Nor do I wish to involve Dorchester here in a new quarrel with you. There has been damage enough done for one night, McTavish, so I will bid you good-by."

"Very well, good-by," nodded McTavish vindictively. "But I warn you that you plot your own ruin in the venture. You will never get into the West with your canoe-cargoes. You will never pass Grande Portage, for I will give orders from this end to that effect.

"You understand me? Grande Portage is the northwest gateway to the *Pays d'en Haut.* We own it and control the land beyond."

Old Beauchamp shook his bald head in dissent.

"In your opinion perhaps, but not in mine," he differed. "I contend that the land is free. The gateway to it is also free, and I am going through."

With a defiant motion of his withered hand to McTavish and a friendly nod to Dorchester he passed out of Beaver Hall. As he turned down the slope on the crest of which the Hall was built a slim, girlish figure darted out of the shadows of the warm June night and caught his arm impulsively.

"You, Cécile!" cried the old man, half-startled. "But you should not come up the hill alone when the Northwest wine runs so free. Where is Boileau?"

"Waiting with the cart at the foot of the hill," Cécile told him. "You were late for the start for Lachine, and I did not know what had happened you. What was wrong at Beaver Hall? We heard a fearful noise."

"It was McTavish," her father explained. "He was drunk and he attacked me. If it hadn't been for Robert Dorchester I don't think I would be here with you now."

"Ah! Robert Dorchester!" exclaimed Cécile, her brown eyes sparkling in the starlight at the name. "I told you just the other day that he was the most tolerant of the Northwesters. He helped you, father?"

"I think he saved my skull for me when McTavish started the fight."

"And that means?" demanded Cécile breathlessly.

"Why, that we stand alone. The Little Company is dead. They drank to its corpse. Long live the Northwest Company is the cry. McTavish has warned me out of the West and I have taken his dare. Boileau pilots my brigade of canoes away in the morning."

Cécile gave a little shiver of apprehension, her beautifully chiseled face turned timidly up to him as she walked with him down-hill, still clinging to his aged arm.

"But do you trust Jean Boileau fully enough to put your whole fortune in his care?" she asked. "There is so much intrigue among the fur companies that one hardly knows one's friends. You're sure Jean will not fail you?"

"Why should he?" demanded her father. "He has served me well, and you know he worships you. Why should he not stand with me to the end? You know all that!"

"Yes, I know all that," brooded Cécile, "but still the times are troublesome and I am so much afraid."

SHE looked back fearfully over her shoulder as she caught the sound of heavy footsteps behind them. The banquet over and the temporary disagreement among themselves settled, the Northwesters were trooping down Beaver Hall Hill in a boisterous crowd. In front she marked the familiar figure of Dorchester, and a surge of gratitude and gladness displaced her fear.

"Robert, I can't tell you what thanks I owe you for helping my father," she burst out impulsively as he came abreast.

The soul of politeness among so many boorish men, Dorchester paused beside her as he passed down, raising his sweeping hat of felt and smiling easily into her face.

"Why, it was nothing, Cécile," he belittled. "Nothing but a foolish misunderstanding among our own ranks. I'm glad Clément came to no harm, however. So you leave in the morning? Well, so do I, to lead the Northwest brigades.

"Jean Boileau pilots you, it seems? I shall not see you again perhaps on the riverway, not till we reach Grande Portage, so I must say good-by for a time. And my last word to you out of Montreal is: Watch Jean Boileau!"

"What's that you say?" blurted old

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Beauchamp. "What do you mean, Dorchester?"

"Watch Jean Boileau," repeated Dorchester, about to stride on as the other Northwesters came in hearing. "Especially at Grande Portage, watch him."

He made to pass on ahead.

"Wait," begged Cécile, shifting her hand from her father's arm to that of Dorchester. "You seem to know something we don't know. Please tell us more."

Dorchester shook his head laughingly.

"I'm sorry, Cécile, but I can not," he told her. "As it stands no other Northwester would have told you as much. I don't want to go as far as to appear disloyal to my partners."

"No, nor would I have you be that," declared Cécile quickly. "But promise me something. I have your warning word out of Montreal. Now promise me something for Grande Portage."

"Very well; I promise—if it is at all within my power," smiled Dorchester.

"Promise me no harm shall come to my father at Grande Portage," she begged, her brown eyes entreating eloquently.

Dorchester hesitated, his fine blue eyes, steel-gray in the starlight, flitting from the aged Beauchamp to Cécile and back again and burning admiringly into her own deep haunting ones. The rest of the Northwesters were upon them, and still he hesitated, held, compelled by the magic of her glance.

"Promise me, Robert," she urged in a whisper.

"It may be hard enough, but I promise," he whispered back.

The boisterous crowd of Dorchester's Wintering partners was right at hand, dividing to pass on either side of the girl and her father, hailing Dorchester himself to come along to Lachine, and the next instant he had clapped his sweeping felt hat on his head and disappeared among the jostling shoulders of his comrades.

"What in the world did he mean by warning us against Boileau?" propounded the old man.

"The truth, whatever that may be," answered Cécile vaguely. "For Robert Dorchester is no liar."

"The devil, girl! You doubt your own servants and trust a rival company's man. Have you lost your heart to the Northwester?"

Cécile, her eyes following instinctively where Dorchester's tall figure had vanished at the foot of Beaver Hall Hill, paused a long time before she answered.

"Father, how can I tell?" she laughed evasively. "Does one lose one's heart as definitely as one loses a brooch or a bracelet? But this much I will tell you: Mctavish may have planned your certain ruin but we have one strong friend at Grande Portage."

"But listen, girl——"

"Hush now, here is the cart and Boileau," warned Cécile. "Don't let him know a breath of our warning. We shall have plenty of time to talk on the river route."

"*Voilà*—there you are!" Jean Boileau hailed them from his cart at the foot of the slope. "I was nearly tying the horse and following you, Cécile, though you ordered me to wait. You see, I thought there was trouble with the Northwesters up yonder."

"Everything runs smoothly, Jean," Cécile assured him coolly, "except that ours is a solitary venture. My father is still outside the Northwest Company and the expedition starts as planned. Don't disturb yourself. Drive on to Lachine. My father and I must try to get a snatch of sleep as we go."

It was a fitful sleep they took, jolting down the Lachine road, propped together against the cushioned back of the seat. Through old Beauchamp's dreams stalked the domineering McTavish roaring out his drunken threats; through Cécile's strode the gallant Dorchester, handsome, courteous, his smiling face alight, his sweeping hat doffed, promising her vague and wonderful things at Grande Portage.

Alert and wakeful, Jean Boileau drove, putting his horse through its paces. The active Northwesters were gone ahead, racing their own vehicles to Lachine, and though left in the rear for the time being Jean knew that by steady driving he would reach the landing for their start.

He was skilled with the lines, as with many other things, for he had entered Beauchamp's service as a boy of ten in the latter's tiny counting-house and through an unbroken stretch of fourteen years had risen to be his head clerk. Pen or paddle it was all the same to him, and he could make up Beauchamp's yearly trade returns as accurately as he could lead his brigades into the *Pays d'en Haut.*

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All his canoe-cargoes had been teamed to Lachine in advance after the fashion of the Northwest and other companies who had used the place since the earliest days as a handy point of embarkation. His canoemen were there waiting, their crafts tuned for the journey, and all he would have to do on the Lachine shore would be to step aboard and take command.

Well satisfied with himself and his preparations, Jean pushed crisply along, but ever his eyes strayed from his lines to the girlish figure propped in fitful sleep against the cushioned seat. Waning starlight and gaining dawnlight wrapped her in a silver haze, her cheeks all rosy, her lips smiling at some pleasant passage in her dream.

The lure of her, smiling there in her sleep, was very potent, so potent that presently Jean could not turn his eyes away to watch his driving. He leaned back from his driving position and all but touched his lips to hers when a sudden jolt of the cart caused Cécile to stir.

She changed her position slightly and nestled her head on her father's shoulder. Jean sat up straight very abruptly and slashed his lines across his startled horse's back.

The spell was broken. The girl's face was in the dark of the old man's shadow, and somehow, frail though he was, it seemed that his very nearness to her had protected her from Jean's caress.

A frown on his face, Jean whirled along the faster, speeding down to the landing and drawing up his cart with a jerk that roused his dozing passengers.

"*Voilà;* it is morning and here we are at Lachine!" he announced. "Look—the Northwest brigades are afloat ahead of us. There they are setting out."

CÉCILE opened her eyes to glimpse a dense throng upon the Lachine shore, a throng gathered to witness the departure of the Northwest brigades and to give them God-speed. The Northwesters' canoes were already in brigade formation, the great Rabiscaw craft piled to the gunwales with trade goods and supplies and manned by their famed Iroquois paddlers.

In the foremost Rabiscaw Cécile could see Dorchester, his huge frame drawn up to its great height, his straight-featured, handsome face touched ruddy by the crimson rays of the sunrise. Surveying his crews with his keen blue eyes he stood, and as Boileau stopped at the landing he caught sight of Cécile in the cart. Once more he smiled and raised his sweeping hat of felt.

"*Au revoir,* till Grande Portage!" he called as he gave the word for the start.

Cécile laughed happily and waved her hand as she got down from her cart.

"*Au revoir,* Robert!" she cried.

On Boileau's swarthy face the frown deepened to a scowl as he noted the passage between the two. His lips curled up into an expression half-way between a sneer and a snarl, and his black eyes glittered with an evil light.

Still he gave no word of protest as he stepped down the shore toward his own waiting canoes, only he vented his anger on the Caughnawaga canoemen as he directed them sharply to their places.

While he marshaled them a shot boomed on the morning air, the chant of Northwest voices rose in unison and Northwest paddles bit the water. With the greater speed of Dorchester's more heavily manned brigades they were gone for the mouth of the Ottawa, leaving Beauchamp's lone brigade to follow in their wake.

In the six canoes Boileau commanded were loaded all Beauchamp's worldly goods—cottons, silks, cutlery, axes, knives, copper utensils, tobacco, spirits, ammunition, provisions and equipment of divers sorts. He had strained the full credit of his tiny counting-house in the expedition to bring back one of the priceless cargoes of fur that were to be had for the trading in the *Pays d'en Haut,* and the total fortune of himself and Cécile was invested in freight. Their total fortune, and they had been warned too late—almost too vaguely—to entrust it to the care of any one but Boileau!

Yet Boileau, leaving Lachine without acclaim and piloting the brigade through the Ottawa and on to Lake Huron, gave no immediate proof that he merited suspicion. On the waterways no package was lost. Over the portages no parcel was missing. Every piece was checked and evey day his bill of lading was complete.

It might have been his own cargo that he carried with his own fortune invested therein, so careful was he of its freighting. Truly a freight of fortune, he swore, and

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he was not the man to lose it through any carelessness of the Caughnawagas!

And just as solicitous was he of his passengers' safety, the old master he had served so long and the daughter whom he worshiped. Beauchamp and the girl rode with him in his own canoe under his own watchful eye.

By Cécile's side Jean hung night and day, watching for the chance he had missed on the drive down the Lachine road, waiting to take what he had all but dared to take upon that morning of departure.

Still old Beauchamp saw that somehow Cécile contrived that Jean always lacked the chance. Whether she knew her heart or not, it was evident to the old man that her heart was questing ahead, pursuing the Northwest brigades into Grande Portage.

Nor did the paddles of the canoemen lag behind the heart of the girl. On their mettle against the greater might of the brigades that had preceded them, they strove with all their power to keep from being outdistanced so that they heeled the Northwesters closely through the waters of Huron that brought them to the settlement of the Sault.

The Northwest canal for freighting goods round the rapids was denied them, but they carried over the rough portage and the canoes took Superior's waters in the final plunge for the mouth of the Pigeon River at its western end.

In the long twilight of a June evening Boileau's brigade dipped over the silvery lake rollers and rounded the wooded island that sheltered Grande Portage Bay. On the sand strip between two crescents, crescent of crystal water and crescent of forested hills, lay the post, guarding the nine-mile footpath that led over the hills to the west beyond.

A sharp-angled canoe-pier of stone-weighted cribwork gave shelter for the birch-bark crafts, and as Boileau's brigade shot inside of it into the mill-pond water it enclosed, a group of men issued from the post gate and came down the sandy shore.

"They are Northwest officers," identified old Beauchamp.

"Yes, there is McGillivray himself," Boileau pointed out.

Cécile's blood leaped at the sight of the Northwesters. She knew McGillivray to see him and also some of the other officers, but she could not see Dorchester among them.

McGillivray, iron-handed in the West as McTavish was in the East, loomed in the forefront, hailing them loudly from the shore end of the canoe-pier and waving a warning hand.

"You can't land here, Beauchamp," he told the old merchant.

"Can't? By whose orders?" demanded Beauchamp.

"By my own orders," growled McGillivray.

"But you are not the whole Northwest Company," protested the clerk Boileau. "The fact that you are in charge here does not give you license to dictate the policies of the company."

"I have my orders from Montreal as well," McGillivray boasted. "Dorchester has just arrived and brings them from McTavish. Is that power enough for you?"

"We are not afraid of you, McTavish or any one else," defied Beauchamp. "Grande Portage is a free highway and we are going through."

"Try it," threatened McGillivray. "You'll set foot ashore at your own risk. I warn you again that the ground is Northwest ground."

"But your proof of that contention?" persisted the old merchant.

McGillivray shrugged his shoulders and turned away with his companion officers.

"Proof?" he laughed back. "Oh, I'll give you proof enough if you do not put your canoes about and return to Montreal."

ABRUPTLY, contemptuously, McGillivray stalked off into the post again with his friends, leaving Boileau's brigade still motionless on the quiet water inside the canoe-pier. To the pier were tied long lines of empty Rabiscaws, unloaded of the cargoes they had brought from Montreal, ready to receive the bales of furs from the West as they came over Grande Portage.

On the sand strip, too, they were drawn up in yellow rows, glowing brightly as the dusk descended and the cooking-fires of canoemen and packers struck their upturned hulls.

It was a critical moment. The eyes of Beauchamp and Cécile were upon Boileau

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whom they had been told to watch, but Boileau did not hesitate a second.

With a sharp command to his Caughnawaga canoemen and a wave of his uplifted arm Jean ordered his six canoes in to the shore. They beached softly upon the curving sand strip; the canoemen stepped out and swiftly emptied them of their packs.

"Now get the tents up and carry in the packs," Boileau ordered them. "Then you may light your fires and eat."

In a few minutes the tents were up, the merchandise of Beauchamp carried safely in and piled inside, the fires kindled in front and the copper kettles slung. The beach was filling up rapidly.

Scores of packers, shouldering the furs of downcoming brigades from the *Pays d'en Haut*, came over the Portage from Port Charlotte at the other end, threw aside their tump-lines and pack-straps and joined their brethren at their evening meal. Hundreds of camp-fires sent long, blood-red flares across the water.

The Northwest rum began to flow and Northwest songs to pour out on the night. Never before had Cécile and her father been so impressed with the might of the company they dared to defy.

For long Northwest Fur had been a name to conjure with, but here was the concrete force of McTavish and the rest of the bold overlords, the giant Rabiscaw canoemen and Pork-Eaters of Montreal together with the wild Northmen from the *Pays d'en Haut* all assembled in a mighty horde.

Even the long, arduous day had not sapped the energy from their brawny bodies. They frolicked about on the beach, wrestling, fighting, carousing with a violence that foretold destruction of anything against which they should turn their strength.

Of Beauchamp's camp, however, the Northwesters took no note. They had had no orders concerning him.

The evening meal went on quietly by the cooking-fires in front of his tents, the Caughnawagas eating by themselves and Cécile, her father and Boileau dining at a separate fire.

As they finished, the gate in the eighteen-foot palisade surrounding the post of Grande Portage opened and a second party of men came forth across the flat illumined by the canoemen's fires.

"Who is it?" demanded Cécile fearfully. "McGillivray and his officers again?"

"No, it is not McGillivray," declared her father, his aged eyes picking them out in the ruddy flame-glare. "But by the saints it is his bullies. Look, his professional bruisers, whom he keeps trained to do his dirty work. My Heavens, yes, and my old eyes deceive me if that isn't Robert Dorchester at their head."

Cécile's heart leaped at the name, and fell as quickly as it leaped, for it was indeed Dorchester at the head of McGillivray's band of bullies. She had heard of these men before, barefisted fighters, ruffians, brutes who fought the battles of the company in which the officials of the company did not wish to appear.

Many an expedition had they stopped, many a lone post had they razed, many a bold free trader driven from the field. Some who had felt their fury had tried to fight the Northwest Fur Company in the courts of Montreal, but none had ever succeeded.

It was just a question in legal minds whether the Montreal courts had any jurisdiction at Grande Portage or in the West beyond. Some contended that the Montreal law extended no farther than the Sault, and even those who believed in the law's hold farther west had never been able to bring any witnesses of McGillivray's outrages across the thousands of miles of wilderness.

And even if they had been able to do so it did not follow that their case was won, for they could not prove that the officers of the Northwest Company were responsible for or had inspired the attack.

Cécile knew all this, and it pained her intensely to see Dorchester in the company of such men. What did it mean after his warning and promise?

He had warned them to be on the lookout for treachery from Jean Boileau. He had promised her that if it was in his power no harm should come to her father here at Grande Portage.

Was he going back on his word? Or had the iron McGillivray overruled him and forced him to carry out McTavish's commands?

Cécile did not know what to think, and she was frightened into a frenzy. She sprang to her feet and rushed in front of her father to face the band advancing on

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their camp-ground, but Jean Boileau was even quicker than she. With a bound he was across the space that separated their fire from the fires of the Caughnawaga canoemen and gathered them together with swift commands.

"Stand here, and here, and here," he directed them, spacing them a few yards apart in front of the tents.

Then he whirled to confront Dorchester and his men before they reached the camp-ground.

"What do you mean, Dorchester, coming in on our camp with those rowdies?" he demanded.

"Why, much more than you imagine, Boileau," laughed Dorchester. "Stand out of the way or the men you are pleased to call rowdies may make you eat your words."

"Keep away from these tents," blustered Boileau.

He made a motion to shove Dorchester back from his line of Caughnawaga canoemen, but Dorchester suddenly seized his outthrust arm and sent him spinning back against the tents fifteen feet away.

"You will have it, will you?" Dorchester yelled. "All right, men; give it to him."

In a mob Dorchester's men fell upon Boileau's Caughnawaga canoemen, striking without mercy, felling them to the sands, hurling them this way and that from in front of Beauchamp's tents.

Nor were the Caughnawagas easy prey. Their very lives at stake, they fought back with billets of wood and axes and paddles, fighting like madmen to stay the rush in the hope of gaining time to launch some of the canoes.

The whole curving sand beach of Grande Portage Bay was in a turmoil, group after group of Northmen leaving their fires at the sudden outbreak and joining in the fray. By weight of numbers the Caughnawagas were borne back against the canvas and they went down in the rolling maze.

Cécile had snatched her father's arm and drawn him aside on the rim of the fight, frantically circling their camp-ground in an effort to break through and save some of their menaced cargoes, but the effort was totally vain. Several times they were struck by hurtling bodies which almost knocked them from their feet, and Cécile heard Dorchester's voice calling to her from the center of the horde of Northmen.

"Keep out, Cécile," he warned. "Keep your father back. You might get trampled underfoot."

"Ha, Robert, you sneak, you traitor!" she shot back. "You would turn on us like this? If I were a man and near enough I would put a knife in you."

IN THE tumult she could not catch his reply. He was locked with Jean Boileau in a tremendous struggle between two of the staked tents, the two of them wedged so tightly by the combatants jammed about them that they could not use their full strength but hugged each other with bear-like hugs and glared malevolently, eye to eye.

Then both tents went down with a thunderous sound of ripping canvas. Boileau and Dorchester went to earth still locked in their tight embrace, and about them Cécile and the old man beheld canvas after canvas which housed their cargoes flattened as if by a gale of wind.

Kicking out the tent-pegs, tearing the canvas to shreds, the horde of Northwesters overran Beauchamp's camp-ground. In a moment there was nothing left of the tents but ribbons which the pillagers cast into the air and sent floating on the wind out over Grande Portage Bay.

Under these drifting streamers they stamped and cheered, jostling friend when they could find no Caughnawaga foe, fighting with each other for the privilege of laying first hands on the cargoes themselves.

Piled up in pyramids, bale upon bale, box upon box, Beauchamp's freight stood exposed in the light of the camp-fires on the shore, the Caughnawaga canoemen who had fought vainly to save it beaten into submission, and upon the piles of goods the Northwesters leaped like some immense wolf-pack upon a mound of food.

Into the air with the tent streamers went the billowy bales of cloth. Axes and knives flashed in the flame-light as they hissed through the night and landed in the waters beyond the canoe-pier.

The copper utensils beat a drum-like tattoo as Dorchester's band made footballs of them along the beach. The tobacco disappeared into capacious pockets, the kegs of spirits were rolled aside to their own fires, and the canisters of powder from the ammunition-boxes smashed open

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where they stood, the black crystals shining weirdly in a ridge upon the spot where the tents had lately rested.

"A torch!" yelled some reckless spirit among Dorchester's men. "A torch from our fires, *mes camarades*, and we will blow all the rest to high Heaven."

Dorchester, rolling over and over with the struggling Boileau on the edge of the sand strip, heard the cry of his men, and he put out all his strength to stagger to his feet. Jean clung to his hips, fighting like a maniac, but he could not hold the Northwest leader down.

Over Jean's shoulder Dorchester saw some of his band running to pluck a brand from the fires, and he shouted to warn Cécile and her father.

"Look out for the powder!" he roared. "Run for the post."

Boileau's hands were on his throat as he shouted, trying to choke him into helplessness, but with a tremendous heave Dorchester shook him off and drove a vicious blow in his face. Jean went down half-stunned upon the sand, and Dorchester was upon him before he could gather together his powers of resistance again.

He pinioned Boileau's flailing arms with his great hands, dragged him kicking and writhing into the shallows and flung him aboard one of the floating canoes. With a shove he shot the light canoe through the entrance of the canoe-pier, and as Jean pulled himself to his knees in the craft, the current caught it and bore it down-channel.

"Go back to Montreal the way you came, Boileau," Dorchester yelled. "As for your Caughnawagas, I can mend them up and use them on the river route."

One instant the flares of the camp-fires illumined the canoe and the beaten man in it, his blood-covered face the face of a conquered wild beast. Then he and his craft were gone in the night round the wooded island and over Lake Superior.

Dorchester whirled as he disappeared and splashed back through the shallows. A thousand men and more were banked round the littered camp-ground of Beauchamp, yelling, dancing, singing, broaching Beauchamp's liquor-kegs and crying for the torchmen to bring on their brands.

Dorchester knew it was useless to try to force his way through the mass in time to prevent a torch being laid to the spilled powder-kegs, and he dashed across the flat toward Cécile and her father.

"Run," he urged; "they'll fire it in a minute. Run for the shelter of the post."

"Not a step," flashed Cécile; "not a step with a robber like you! Sweet saints, look what you have done—ruined my old father after all your promises!"

"Hush, Cécile, hush!" laughed Dorchester as he caught her by the arms. "Keep those words for Boileau if you ever see him again. You see he sold you out before ever you left Montreal."

"Eh, you say so?" quavered old Beauchamp.

"Yes, before ever you dipped a paddle on your journey westward. But run, I say; I'll tell you as we go."

One arm slipped round Cécile's waist, the other across the old merchant's shoulders, and half-carrying the two in his tremendous strides, Dorchester rushed them toward the gate of the post.

"I warned you," he told them as he ran, "and I knew what I was doing. Boileau traded your cargoes to McTavish for Northwest shares in Montreal because he knew he would never get through Grande Portage with them.

"He left you like a traitor, Clément, and came over to us, and McTavish was shrewd enough to make his bargain binding. He made Jean put up a money deposit of a value equal to the cargo value to deliver everything here, and Jean delivered."

"The thief, the cur!" denounced Cécile, the indignation that Dorchester's seeming misconduct had aroused turning upon the missing clerk. "But it seems to me it was his own goods he lost if his deposit covered them."

"Yes," agreed Dorchester, laughing deep in his huge chest, "the cargoes were his own under his own bond, and that was why he fought so furiously to save them. But we lose nothing, Clément, and you lose nothing either. We have not yet turned the shares over and you can take your choice of the money or the Northwest shares."

"By Heavens, Robert, for a little back yonder I doubted your intentions, but I don't doubt now," breathed Beauchamp gratefully. "It seems I have found a true friend although I was slow to recognize the truth.

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"McTavish is far enough away, and I forgive his drunkenness. For his enmity I will pay him out another time. So I take the Northwest shares."

They were in the open post gateway, safe from raining missiles, when a voluminous shout of warning rose from the beach. The one thousand Northmen scattered this way and that, diving for the rocks and bushes.

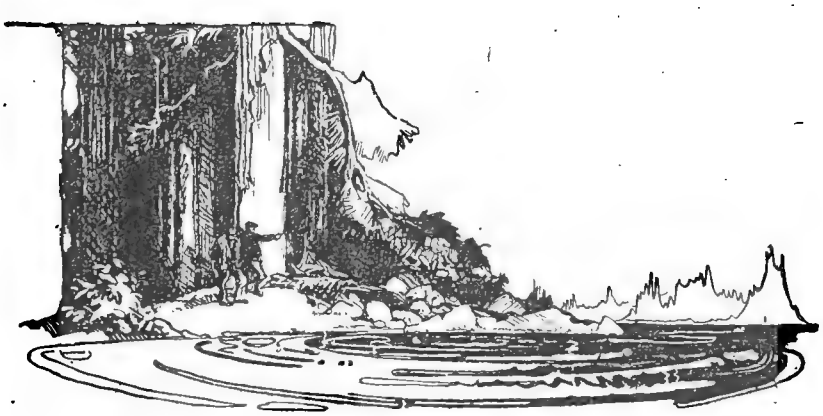
Down among the winking camp-fires the three at the post could see a resinous torch eating its way with a long flare across Beauchamp's camp-ground. There was a red puff as it reached the sprinkled powder-train, a swift curtain of fire drawn across the night, then a report that rattled the palisades beside them.

For a moment everything was etched in a vivid white glare like that of sheet lightning momentarily arrested in the sky. The wooded island that screened the bay stood out sharply, its tree-tops waving, its bouldered shores white and clean. The space of the channel showed between, with the canoe-pier, the quiet harbor and the sand beach beside. Where Boileau had staked his tents appeared nothing but a ragged hole in the ground.

"The last of Jean's freight of fortune, Cécile," whispered Dorchester. "He went over to the Northwesters in the certainty that you could do nothing here but follow, but his methods are not mine. Your father had his choice and so have you. What do you say?"

"Why," laughed Cécile, her brown eyes flashing tenderly in the vivid white light as they looked into Dorchester's, "I am a dutiful daughter, Robert, and my father's choice is mine."

As abruptly as the light had flared the darkness descended over island, harbor and beach, and as it descended Dorchester's arm crept more closely round the girl in the gates of Grande Portage.



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Missionary Bill

By E. E. Harriman

Author of "The Splitrock Mine," "Paying His Debt," etc.

"MISSIONARY BILL" sat on the fiddley hatch, warming his back in the current of hot air that rolled up from the fireroom. He was off duty just now and the wind blew chill off the Farallones. A stiffish breeze it was and the old destroyer rolled from hip to shoulder in a way that would have brought discredit to the digestive apparatus of a green hand. To Bill, sitting thus in comfort, came one, "Limey" by nickname; 'Enery 'Arris if you let him tell it.

"'Ere, you bloomin' big 'ippo! 'Itch hover an' gimme a bit o' the warm," and Limey nudged Bill with a hard elbow. "Cripes! If I 'ad a back like your'n I'd 'ire hout to a 'ousemover, I would. Save buyin' jack-screws. Just 'itch Bill on one corner an' 'iste 'er hup, quick an' heasy-like. Puffickly good plan an' cheap.

"Looky 'ere, Bill! Hi got a 'ole month's pye left an' hevery bleedin' spuke burnin' a 'ole in my uniform. Wot sye we 'ave a bit of a blow w'en we 'it Los Angeles? Nothin' 'ard an' 'asty, y' know, but just a bit of a blow. We got it comin' to hus."

Bill scratched his starboard ear and considered. He recalled the fact that when he and Limey enjoyed shore leave together in the city he had been obliged to fight four separate times to save the cockney from being duly and thoroughly pulverized.

"I dunno, Limey," temporized Bill. "Have to think about it."

"Garn! Wot the bleedin' —— you got to think abaht? We just goes for a bit of a blow an' that hends it."

"Mebbe, if you'd stow that tongue of yours in your ditty-box and leave it aboard, we might make it that easy," said Bill. "But a bit of a blow with you means nagging strangers into a fight and raising old Cain generally for half the time and explaining to the judge for the other half."

"Garn, ye ruddy dray 'oss! 'Oo, I harsks ye, 'oo does the fightin'? Hit ain't no fault o' mine. Peaceable-like as a bloomin' lamb Hi've been hall my life, but someun is always a-pickin' on me, 'count o' my houtside measure. If the bloomin' blighters would size me hup 'cordin' to me spirit they'd let me sail be me own chart.

"Now that there bally Dutchman on Sutro 'Eights, 'e 'adn't no call to 'it me 'cause Hi slanged 'is bleedin' kaiser. An' them two on Market Street——"

Bill spread a mighty hand over Limey's face and tipped him over.

"Belay that, you phonograph! You're as noisy as a loose bilge-pump. Cut out the *palabreria*. You do the talking and ring me in to do the heavy fighting right along, you swab!"

Limey recovered his balance entirely undisturbed by words or action and took up the subject promptly.

"Just the syme it won't 'urt hus a bit to 'ave a bit of a blow an' we 'ave it comin' to hus. Didn't we lose 'arf our liberty at Frisco, 'count o' horders comin' to 'ead south? An' the second promised 'e'd

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nyke it hup to hus later. 'Ow abaht it, *Bill*?"

"I'll think about it," answered the big fellow. "Hump yourself! There goes mess-call, you sea-spider!"

Huge of limb and hard of head, Bill, champion fighter of the fleet, followed his mate after chow. The impudent, bull-terrier face of Limey stood well below Bill's shoulder and his waistline would scarcely exceed one of Bill's thighs, but the two were inseparable. The intimacy had begun with Bill's offer of protection against numbers in an Eastern port three years before.

Limey, that strange product of the slums, was a pigmy beside Bill. Peppery of temper, caustic of tongue, master of vituperation, Limey on shore was like a loose fox-terrier in a dog-show. He nipped anything that offered and stirred up trouble right and left.

" 'Ow did Hi get in the bloomin' Hamerican Navy, eh? W'y, jest as heasy as turnin' my thumb," he had told one who questioned. "Hi tole the recrootin' hofficer Hi come from Heastport, Myne. Hi did, too, but Hi only stopped there hover night. Wot's the hodds?"

The destroyer slid into her berth at San Pedro as a polished knife slides into its sheath. Tied up between a cargo-boat and a lumber-schooner, she lay against her fenders and slipped up the pilings with the rising tide.

The first liberty party made ready to go ashore. His eyes gleaming eagerly, Limey strode across the deck and stopped before the second in command. He saluted smartly and waited.

"Oh, yes! I promised you and Bill leave down here, didn't I?" said the officer. "Look smart now and get off with this party. Keep clean and straight. Report on board at the end of the second dog watch."

Again Limey saluted and then he scurried off after Bill. He found him just settling his flat cap carefully over his right ear.

MISSIONARY BILL had earned his title at Seattle a few years before. He had come aboard with his uniform in strings and his face marred. One big bruise stood out on his right cheek which was swollen to great thickness.

Bill tried to slip aboard and reach his quarters unobserved by the higher powers, but he blundered almost into the arms of the commander. He stopped, rigid at attention, his right hand snapping up to the salute while his rags fluttered around him.

"Now what?" roared that gentleman, blazing with wrath. "You get shore leave and come aboard looking as if you'd been run through a shoddy-machine. What the blinkety - blank - ding - dong - dash have you been up to, you blankety-rip-snort-whoop rag-bag?"

Bill's eyes were fixed on a point six inches above Four Striper's head and his attitude was strictly according to regulations.

"Beg to report performing active missionary work in Pennant Saloon, sir!" he said, and waited.

"Missionary work? You're a —— of a missionary!" came the blast. "Explain your meaning instantly or take eight days in the brig for impertinence to your commanding officer."

"Aye, aye, sir! Found shore-going party from German ship in saloon under bull-necked bo'sun, sir. Bo'sun had a temper, sir. Called our flag a *'verfluchte'* rag and the emblem of a *'schweinhundlich'* kennel, sir.

"Had to correct that impression, sir. Did a little missionary work on bo'sun and he apologized handsomely, sir."

"Ha! Hum! Lay for'ard and get into whites. Er! Ah! Wait a moment. You don't mean to tell me that one German bo'sun did all that damage to you, do you?" asked Four Striper, looking keenly at Bill.

"No, sir. He had help, sir. There were fourteen in the party, sir. One got at me with a brass spittoon. I guess he'll live, sir, if the doctor has luck and he don't have too many complications."

"Hmmm!" said Four Striper, and his voice held a satisfied note it had not owned before. "Lay for'ard! Ahem! Turn in those rags and get a new set of blues. Yes, and see the surgeon about that cheek."

The commander of the German vessel lodged a complaint against Bill and claimed that the big sailor had used weapons in an unprovoked attack on the bo'sun. Unfortunately for his contention the bartenders stood together on the side of Bill and five disinterested customers bore like testimony. Four Striper Gordon accompanied Bill to the court and stood up for him like a real American.

"By gad, sir, I'd throw any sailor of mine overboard if he would let such a

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remark pass in a home port or out of it, by gad, sir!" Gordon had said to the court. "In my opinion the blank-dashed Dutchman got what he went after and richly deserved. I want my man released, clean."

Commander Gordon got what he wanted and Bill went back to duty in triumph, his record white and clean. But Limey had heard, listening like a weasel, and Bill had been greeted as Missionary Bill by the crew. The title had stuck and Big Bill Anthony, fleet champion, had been Missionary Bill from San Diego to Sitka these four years.

BILL and Limey got off the train at Sixth and Main, undecided where to go. Like a pair of great boys in a strange village they wandered here and there, looking about them with curiosity strangely mixed with indecision. They grinned broadly whenever a friendly citizen hailed them or gave them a nod in passing.

"Friendly sort here," said Bill to Limey. "Now mind we ain't going to do any lushing or scrapping in this man's town. We gotta keep the uniform clean and ourselves straight and not do anything to make the Navy look bum. Take a reef in your tongue for this trip, Limey."

"Yah! You big lump! Hi'll be walkin' smooth an' heven w'en you're stubbin' oes on slick cement. Has fer my tongue it ain't no more on the wrong tack nor your fists is."

"Uh-huh, but your tongue pilots the way and drags the fists in."

"Aw, ——! Stow the chivvyin', you big gob, an' come on!"

They wandered north and wandered south, taking various samples of brew by the way, but nothing hard. Hard liquor and mixed drinks had been barred for this trip by Bill. Finding nothing exciting along Main Street, they turned toward the river along Ninth.

"This is too blawsted tyme," complained Limey after a block or two. "We 'aven't a bit o' excitement. Cawn't we find a dogfight er somethin' else stirrin'?"

As he spoke two pimple-faced rats in flashy togs came out of a wrecking-company's yard just ahead. They turned to meet the sailors and one spoke around a bobbing coffin-nail that stuck to a loose lip.

"Get onto the blink-dashed flatcaps! Watch me make the runt gimme the road, —— —— 'im!"

He lurched to the left and his hunched shoulder caught Limey in the port breast, throwing him in a quarter-turn against Bill.

"Hi sye, matey! Keep yer course an' don't go foulin' them as is yer betters!" sputtered Limey in indignation.

"Go to ——!" snarled the rat, his mean little eyes looking vicious.

Limey's left replied to that, flush upon the twisted mouth. The rat staggered against his mate, recovered and drew a hand from his coat pocket.

Came the gleam of battered brass as he struck and Limey ducked. The knuckles scraped low over his left ear even as his left went out again, this time to the wrist in the rat's midriff. The second rat kicked for the groin, but his foot fell short.

Bill had swept a big hand forward and to the right, flat across the kicker's chest, sending him backward, but bringing him up again with a clutch on the coat.

A second later two mean-eyed, slinking rats of the lowest human order were making Ninth Street melodious with their howls. Bill had them both by the scruff and was administering punishment. Far apart he swung them, then brought them back into intimate contact.

Three times their faces welded into one gory mess. Then Bill jerked them, long ways and hard, out into the street, wiped his hands and walked on.

"Come along, Limey," he said without a glance at the wreckage. "I don't believe these dogfish want to talk to us any more."

"Talk?" said a salesman, lounging in the door of the wrecking-company's office. "Do you call that talking?"

"Right-o, matey! The only kind of talk scum like that understands."

With a nod and grin to the salesman the big fellow kept on his way, Limey chattering at his side like an enraged monkey.

"W'y didn't we tyke the knucks off that slob, Bill? 'E 'adn't no right to be carryin' them that wye. 'Old hup, Bill! Let's go back an' myke 'im deliver. C'mon, Bill, let's!"

"Hold your course," growled Bill. "He can eat those knucks for all o' me. Never go back to better a job like that after you've left it."

Limey protested, but Bill was determined.

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He took Limey by the arm and propelled him steadily along the walk till he gave in.

"Let be!" said Limey. "Tyke yer bread-hooks hoff me arm. Yer mykin' a bruise here bone deep."

Bill let go at once, knowing by Limey's tone that he had given in. Limey rubbed his arm exaggeratedly and twisted his face for a second but forgot it a moment after.

The pair had reached the section where little homes of the laboring class begin. Off to the south among the walnut, acacia and pepper trees children swarmed. In the street, in yards, on porches, even on roofs, they played by the dozen.

Now shrill screams arose from a yard in the middle of the block. A woman added her voice to those of excited children.

"There's real trouble there, Limey," said Bill, leaping into the street. "Sou' by east and full speed."

Swiftly the two sailors sped to the rescue, leaping the low fence in front of the place from which came the screams and cutting across diagonally to the rear corner of the house. Rounding the corner at a speed that made them clutch at the boarding, they came upon a scene of childish terror and motherly anxiety.

On her knees beside a boy, whose shoulders she supported with one arm, knelt a mother, her other arm extended in a futile effort to break the impending fall of a second boy. This youngster was hanging by his hands from the metal gutter at the eaves, screaming frantically for "Mother!" A glance showed the first boy safe,. though badly hurt by his fall, and Bill went into action.

Catching Limey by the waist and tossing him high, the big man took the shoes of his mate on his shoulders, shifted his hands down to the ankles and stepped close to the house.

"Grab hold and swarm up!" he ordered. "Lively is the word, Limey! Shift to port and get a bread-hook—on that jigger-bracket, I guess—and stick your toes in the gingerbread-work.. Make a long arm to starboard and nip across into the upper deadlight. Shove the lights down and straddle 'em. Now you can reach him."

Limey had gone from Bill's shoulders to a big bracket, from there to an upper window-sill and now, astride the lowered sashes, reached for the frantic youngster. As his clutch encompassed the thighs of the child a yell that made all previous efforts seem mild and tame by comparison shook the loose shingles on that roof.

Sure that the slipping of his fingers meant following his brother to the ground, the boy howled his prettiest. Limey jerked him loose with little delay and passed him inside.

"'Ere! 'Ere! 'Old 'ard, you young steam sirene!" said Limey. "You're not 'urt! Now run along to mama, do, an' don't bust a blood-wessel."

The instant the boy felt the floor under his feet he plunged free from Limey's hands, shrieked, "Mother!" once and clattered through the room, along a hall and down the stairs. Limey followed in a more leisurely fashion.

He found the mother holding the rescued hanger in her arms while Bill sat on a door-step with the fallen boy on his knee, carefully supported by a big arm. With his fingers he was going over the child's body tenderly to ascertain the extent of his hurt.

Limey strode past Bill and helped the woman to her feet, talking steadily all the while.

"'Old 'ard, mum," he said kindly. "Don't tyke on so. The young un is down from aloft an' t'other one ain't 'owlin' like 'e was. There ain't no call fer highstrikes. Wot's the verdic', Bill? Hany special damage?"

"Broken left arm, Limey," said Bill in a low tone. "Can't find any other trouble. There, there, youngster! Don't yelp and we'll run you in dry-dock and have you patched up shipshape."

The mother groaned shudderingly, wiping her streaming eyes.

"A broken arm, and my man just back to work after nine weeks of typhoid! Oh, dear! It never rains but it pours."

"Where is the nearest bone-carpenter, ma'am?" asked Bill.

"Two blocks south, on Eleventh. Dr. Ben Liscomb. He took care of my man. He'll know the place if you say Mrs. Geiger wants him."

Bill nodded to Limey and the little man sprinted around the house and set off down the cross-street at a lively gait. Bill began on a sea-yarn spun out of his imagination; the mother sat down beside him and the neighborhood children gathered round.

His interest caught by the uniform, then nailed fast by the first words of the story, the injured boy lay quiet and listened.

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Through the entire period of waiting he never took his eyes off the face of Bill and no sound escaped him. When Bill saw Limey come round the corner with a shabbily dressed, whiskery doctor following he rushed the finish of his story.

"And so the mess-punk turned the empty mess-kid bottom up over the head of the ugly cook and kicked him into the gravy-kettle, stern on, and that settled the question of the spoiled gravy, for the captain ordered it thrown to the sharks. Oh, yes. The cook took his meals standing up for the next two weeks.

"Hello, doc! Want to see the best plucked kid in your town? Bet you a bone he don't yell once while you set that arm. Are you on? Cash goes to the kid."

WITH a grave smile the doctor laid a dollar on the buttress of the steps and Bill covered it just as gravely.

"Now then, commodore," Bill said to the boy, "the money's up and I'm betting on your nerve. Show this landlubber that the Navy knows what it is talking about. Grab my fin and hang on hard. Bite my thumb if it hurts too bad. Now, doc, do your work lively."

"Shipshape and regular," said Bill, looking at his thumb when the doctor had finished. "Took me at my word, all right. Say, kid, you're some biter, but we beat doc out of his cart-wheel, didn't we?

"Here! Catch hold of the dollars and show us a grin. If you're all through, doc, Limey and me would like to talk to you private."

They walked around a corner of the house and stopped in an angle. Bill dragged a roll of greenbacks from his uniform and held out one hand to Limey, who passed over his roll.

"Now then, doc, we holds out three bucks apiece for chow and the afternoon's entertainment. The rest you're to hand over to the lady. We can hit the street this way, Limey. *Adios*, doc. Now, Limey, git!"

The doctor looked after the two sailors for a moment, then went slowly back to the mother and placed the bills on her arm.

"Those blessed sailormen sent this to you, Mrs. Geiger. Tell John I say he must go easy and slow with his work for a time or he will have a relapse. Don't worry over Eddie's arm. It will heal fast."

Then the doctor, one of those who minister to the poor with no hope of ever getting out of that class themselves, hurried away with a new idea about the American gob.

THE noon whistles blew with Limey and Bill back on Main Street. Limey appealed to Bill, his sharp little face keenly alert.

"Hi sye, Bill, w'en we goin' to heat, eh? Me belly's floppin' ag'in' me spine like a loose tops'l ag'in' a mast, it's that empty."

"Any old place, any old time," said Bill. "There's a sign ahead. Let's try in there."

They turned into the restaurant and started down the aisles.

"Heave to!" rumbled the voice of Bill. "You'll need collision-mats in another fathom. Don't you see you're getting in among light-sailing craft? Put your helm hard over and make your berth up against this wall.

"Here is a little table. Drop your mud-hook."

Bill sat down with his back toward the entrance and Limey faced him. Bill picked up a menu-card and began to study it, but Limey let him feel the toe of a Navy shoe smartly applied.

"Wot the blazes! 'Ere comes the bloke with the pompadour 'air an' a neck like a blawsted grampus wot sat be'ind the desk makin' chynge. 'E looks 'ot in 'is bearin's. Kinda hagitated-like. 'E's 'eadin' stryte fer hus hunder full steam."

The proprietor of the restaurant paused beside the little table, his pig-eyes red with rage and his face apoplectic. He looked at Limey with contempt, then turned to Bill aggressively.

"We don't serve no men in uniform here," he said. "Get out!"

Bill's eyes narrowed. Did he pronounce "out" as if it held a d? It seemed so to Bill. The man waved an imperative hand.

"You git oudt, right avay!" he repeated, and Bill knew.

"Come on, Limey," he said, rising. "There are women present and old Pig-eye knows no Navy man will raise a ruckus in that case. That is why he is so brash. He feels safe."

Pig-eye glared but made no futher remarks, though he followed the seamen clear to the door. Once over the threshold Bill stopped.

"Mind your eye, Dutchy," he said,

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calmly decisive. "We are outside of your joint. Don't shove your pig snout one inch into Main Street unless you want to see what kind of doctors they use at the receiving hospital in this burg."

The first door north of the restaurant opened into a saloon. Bill put a shoulder to the screen and spoke to Limey.

"There's only one thing that will take the taste of that out of my mouth. I am going to have some real Scotch."

Limey smacked his lips.

The bartender set out glasses and a bottle. Bill poured a modest drink and shoved the bottle to Limey. Both men turned so that they faced each other.

"'Ere's 'ow!" said Limey, and both heads tipped back.

Out of the tail of his eye Bill saw a door in the side-wall swing. Through this door bulged Pig-eye, rampant. Bill set his glass on the bar and picked up the change from a dollar-bill.

Pig-eye pushed his big carcass between the shipmates and faced Bill. He was fully as large a man as Bill, though his self-indulgence showed itself plainly and much to his disadvantage.

"I own this blace too, and I don't vant any uniforms in it," he said in a belligerent tone. "Get oudt right avay qvick!"

"'Vast, there, bo'sun!" said Bill, a glint in his eye. "There are no skirts here to bother and you get what's coming to you, see?

"How did you feel after that little harmony meeting in the old Pennant Saloon in Seattle four years ago? Haven't got any fourteen sauerkrauts to back you here, so maybe you'd better sing in a whisper, Pig-eye. I may as well tell you, bo'sun, that I don't love you a —— bit."

"Shut up und get oudt, *verfluchte* ——————!" sang Pig-eye, and Bill swung.

Over on a round card-table went Pig-eye, capsizing and rolling to his feet with practised ease. Beyond doubt he had been knocked down before and had learned a thing or two thereby. From his mouth came a raucous roar in German, a call for aid, a rallying cry.

From behind the bar came two bartenders, viciously ready. Through the side-door that led to the restaurant swarmed tough waiters, every man a scrapper.

Pig-eye drove for Bill, crouching and trying for a body hold. He was a wrestler rather than a fighter; but a wrestler can do weird things to an opponent whom he bests, and Bill dodged those curling fingers.

His right came round to meet the side of that round ball of a head with its high-backed parietal bone and fat-buttressed neck. His fist glanced off a raised shoulder and the huge arms went round his body.

The German heaved suddenly, violently, at the same time whirling from right to left. The right foot of Bill shot out, touched the floor, and he completed the turn Pig-eye had begun, but his left arm had circled that fat neck from above and his forearm was under the chin. Pig-eye's feet left the floor for a second and the circling arm straightened. Pig-eye went out flat and struck the floor from neck to heels at one and the same instant.

A number of waiters, led by the two bartenders, tried to smother Bill in a concerted rush. Three waiters sought Limey's downfall. A dodge, a lightning-quick hook to the ribs and one of the trio went on past Limey, to bunt the bar forcibly.

The second got in a light tap on Limey's cheek, but he paid for it with his wind, for Limey drove his left half-way to the elbow in the waiter's midriff. The third carried Limey to the floor, but a crossed leg beneath the waiterly shins heaved him over endwise.

Bill floored two waiters and the leading bartender, shook himself free from the wolf-pack in time to meet Pig-eye's rush and planted an uppercut that brought his enemy upright. The short-arm jolt to the chin came as close after the uppercut as the shot after the trigger-squeeze. Pig-eye flopped and two waiters fell over him.

Four rushed Limey, carrying him to the sawdust, and, fastening on his extremities, held him there while they amused themselves and took relief for their savage feelings by kicking him.

Barely time had Bill for one swift glance at his mate and the quartet of torturers. Then the swarm of curs closed in from all sides at once, with Pig-eye roaring in from the right.

Up out of the mêlée shot the head bartender, arching over to the fancy glass on the back bar. Fair on his crown he landed, smashing glassware and mirrors, dropping behind the bar to mop his bleeding scalp and curse. To right and left and before fell the fighting waiters.

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Full into the ribs of Pig-eye crashed the fists of Bill, now gone berserk from that sight of Limey, multiple-kicked and helpless. He shook off his assailants as a grizzly shakes off howling curs. He battered his way again to Pig-eye, backed him into a corner and beat his face to pulp and his torso to jelly.

He threw a waiter over the bar to join the beer-jerker crouching there. He knocked the second bartender through the swing doors to the street and threw two more waiters after him. He kicked away the battered wretches who strove to bring him down by crawling beneath the battling arms to clutch his ankles.

Then he reached Limey.

There was no wasted chivalry in the action of Bill. He had seen his mate held helpless by four and kicked brutally. Now he walked with heavy feet on those four and kicked their heads low.

OUT on the sidewalk the bartender had managed to sit up and reach a pocket. Shrill, insistent, trilled the call of a police whistle. A spasm of courage went through the battered throng and they closed in on Bill again.

Limey got to his feet and limped around the bar. He saw the two crouching there and charged them with a beer-bottle in each hand, snatched from a shelf in passing.

Out into the open room scurried the pair, stooping to avoid the skull-cracking bottles. Behind the bar Limey paused, hurling his bottles with sure aim at the men who charged Bill.

Holding the fort, with all the ammunition heart could wish, he trimmed off the outside layer of fighters. The bartender from outside, having raised response from a cop far down the street, coming in to take up the fight, met a full bottle of export beer, big end first, coming with all the vim of a three-inch shell. Further proceedings held no interest for him.

The swing doors clashed against the walls, thrown back by the rush of a thick-shouldered, thick-skulled cop. Out of his one operative eye Pig-eye caught sight of the police uniform and made his expiring rally. He rushed Bill from the starboard quarter and swung for his neck, below the ear, bellowing like an insane bull as he did so.

Unluckily for his purpose t[illegible] antedated the swing by just that fraction of a second required for Bill to duck. The big fist swung through the air behind and above the sailor's head and Bill revolved with his right arm out and his right foot coming round in the opposite direction.

The foot swept the underpinning from beneath Pig-eye and the arm threw his shoulders in the opposite direction. The underpinning became the superstructure and Pig-eye stood on his left cheek very abruptly.

"Here, youse!" said the patrolman, seizing Bill by the shoulder. "Wot the —— you doin'?"

"Didn't you see that guy swing at my head?" asked Bill.

"Sure I did, but wot in —— had went before that? Here comes the sarge. He'll 'tend to youse," exclaimed the patrolman.

Through the swing doors came a sergeant of police and with him two more patrolmen. The sergeant checked his rush just inside the door and looked about him.

Broken bottles, wrecked card-tables and scattered chairs littered the floor, interspersed with groaning men who had stopped some of Limey's shells or Bill's fists.

"Charlie," he barked, "ring up the wagon and an ambulance. Tell Murphy to warn Doc Cosgrove he'll have a dozen or more to mend. Get a move on.

"Collins, see if that fellow with the mashed face among the glass is out or dead. Big fellow, what the —— do you mean by starting a riot in this man's town, anyhow?"

"If you are talking to me you are addressing the wrong man," said Bill very calmly. "That imported kraut-barrel did the starting."

"It iss a lie," spluttered Pig-eye.

"Easy with that talk, Dutchy," answered Bill, stepping closer.

"Let up on that, both of you," ordered the sergeant, placing himself between the two. "The judge can hear the evidence."

"Yus! 'E'll 'ear it all right!" sputtered Limey, coming forward. "An' so will you. That there blighter with a neck like a bloomin' sea-pig chased hus hout of 'is chow-parlor 'count o' our uniforms, an' w'en we was takin' a Scotch apiece in 'ere, hall quiet an' horderly, 'ere 'e comes an' [illegible]es —— ag'in. 'E got wot 'e needed."

"That'll do for you," remarked the

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sergeant. "Leave the rest for the court to hear. Who threw those bottles?"

"Hi did. Wot of it?"

Limey bristled up to the officer.

"Wot's more, Hi'm —— glad of it. With fifteen or sixteen Dutch bangin' away at Bill, wot should I of did? Say please to 'em, eh?"

The heavy police wagon clattered up to the curb, followed by an ambulance, cutting short Limey's speech. The sergeant looked around at the battered crowd, mentally tallying those to go in the ambulance. His gaze went over Pig-eye slowly and he swore.

"Otto, you sure look like ——," he said. "If a mule had kicked ye with both feet and him rough-shod you wouldn't have looked no worse. You get into the ambulance, and you, and you, and you——"

He packed the ambulance with the worst battered specimens. Limey, Bill and five slightly wounded waiters he relegated to the wagon.

"Tom, you and Charlie go with the wagon. Collins, go back to your beat. Otto, keep your face inside for ——'s sake, you do look so like ——!

"Drive careful, Jim. Line out, Johnson, and we'll follow you."

Johnson shook the reins over the big bays and the wagon rolled off toward Broadway. The sergeant mounted the step of the ambulance and it rolled more slowly after the wagon.

Bill looked along the row that he headed in the wagon, then glanced across at Limey's file. Next to Bill came three of Otto's crowd and Officer Charlie. Next to Limey were two and Officer Tom.

Officer Tom looked across at the man facing him and grinned.

"You are a —— of a looking crowd, sure enough. What were you up to to get mussed so badly?" he inquired.

"We just tried to stop a riot these sailors started," said the man.

"Yer a —— liar!" yelped Limey instantly. "Yer bleedin' boss went balmy w'en 'e see the uniform an' hordered hus hout of 'is bloomin' chow-parlor. Then 'e follered hus into the bar an' raised ——. We was peaceful an' quiet-like as 'eart could wish till 'e butted hin."

"That —— fool ..kney lies," asserted ... the fellow. "The big guy hit the boss in the eye without no reason and then started to clean out the place. They were lookin' for trouble when they come in."

"You sure are a cheerful liar, aren't you now?" said Bill.

The battered one retorted with a vile epithet and Bill went into action. He could not reach the insulting enemy, so he did the next best thing. His shoulder jerked against the next neighbor, throwing him over on his fellows. Bill spun round on the seat, humped against the high front; his knees came up to his chin and his feet swung in against the next man. Then those powerful legs straightened with a jerk and Officer Charlie shot out over the rear end.

Instinctively the officer grabbed at the first thing that came handy, which proved to be the user of vile language. He in turn set his hooks in his left-hand neighbor, who grasped the kickee, and the string went dribbling out to the pavement.

With a yell of delight Limey promptly copied Bill's action, sending Officer Tom and his pair to keep Bill's string in countenance.

The driver hauled in on his reins and set his brake, turning his head to learn the cause of all that noise. Gently but firmly Bill gripped his collar, jerked him back into the body of the wagon and shot him out after his fellows.

Two seconds later Bill was in the driver's seat, the brake off and the ribbons slapping. He yelled to Limey to "lay for'ard and make it eight bells till we let go anchor."

UP THE street tore the big team, Limey ringing the big gong like a Chinese priest gone crazy. Three bullets whined past overhead and Bill swung the team into Spring Street to get out of range.

Clang, clang, clang! Rattle, bounce, crash, clatter! Clang, clang, clang!

"Gangway! Gangway! Sheer off, you lubbers, and give us sea-room!"

Clatter, bang, rattle!

"Keep that gong going, Limey, you swab! Sheer off! Sheer off, you lobsters! Gangway!"

Up Spring to First and the horses slowed to make the turn, Bill giving them their heads, reasoning wisely that they knew the road. Around to the left and up past Bi... charging the hill beyond with vim ...lor, attracting the attention of

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officers off duty who clustered before the stone building on the left.

The heavy wagon slowed its speed until the horses barely trotted. Then they swung to the right, well out, swung to the left with much rattling of feet on the stone pavement, and backed till the wheels bumped heavily on the curb. Throwing up their heads, their ears tight against their necks, the team threatened each other with bared teeth, shifted their feet a trifle, pushed out with stiffened jaws to loose the reins, sighed and settled for a rest.

"Hop out, Limey," said Bill. "Our mud-hook is down."

A burly lieutenant came out of the station and looked at Limey and Bill. He scowled as he did so.

"Well!"

He said the one word and then stopped as if he did not know how to continue, but he did. He was only waiting for his temper to slow down to talking pitch.

"You're a nice pair of birds! Starting a riot and then kicking the officers out of the wagon and racing in without them! Fine birds, I don't think!"

This by way of preliminary, foreword, preface or introduction to his main theme. Then came the high, low and middle distance swearing of this police grandee. Limey tried to look meek, but only succeeded in looking sly. Bill wore a face as impassive as granite, his gaze shooting above the speaker's head in strict consonance with naval rules.

There is something highly unsatisfactory in swearing at men who neither rage nor cringe. It is too much like whipping a post.

Long practise on the high seas had made Bill perfect in immobility. He could stand at attention and take a cursing that warped the deck-plates on a battle-ship without batting an eyelash.

When the lieutenant began to stammer and repeat himself Bill knew he had reached his limit. In another half-minute he shut off.

"March inside," he ordered. "The driver phoned in that you had run off with the wagon and we are all ready for you."

Bill and Limey marched, literally, taking the regulation drill-step and carrying themselves erect, in perfect form. Some of the police winked and grinned at each other as they closed in behind the pair.

At the desk they gave their names and their ship, then waited. A husky sergeant moved up beside Bill and paused.

The lieutenant barked an order and the sergeant moved instantly. His hands went out as he tried to get a wrestler's wrist-hold.

There was a swift turn, a half-second's mix-up, and the sergeant struck the advancing rank of patrolmen nearly horizontal. Bill faced the bunch at two paces.

"Lieutenant, give your orders and I will obey, but don't let any of your men lay hands on me," he said quite evenly.

For two ticks of the watch the lieutenant hesitated. Then he passed in front of his men and walked toward the big steel gate.

"Come with me," he gruffly ordered, and Bill caught step.

"March in there, both of you," he commanded as the gate swung.

Inside with perfect step passed Bill and Limey, saluting as they walked before the lieutenant, and the gate clanged behind them. An audible breath of relief exhaled from the bunched officers.

"Ecod, Oi'll go to the mat wid anny crook, but Oi drah the line at a felly loike him wid the quarthermasther's riggin' on his arrrum," said an Irish patrolman. "There'd 'a' been unyforms to buy if the arrders had called fer rough wurrrk, Oi'm thinkin'."

Bill and Limey sat down on a bench near the front and talked in low tones. Before they had been there ten minutes the missing driver, patrolmen and battle-scarred waiters rolled up in an express wagon they had commandeered. They boiled into the station and glared at the two sailors through the steel gate.

The police chief came strolling down from his office and saw the evidences of war. He looked from the battered, loud-talking crowd on the outside of the gate to the two quiet, self-contained men inside.

Several times he did this, apparently comparing them. Then he spoke to the lieutenant who had led the prisoners inside.

"Take these two seamen into Judge Vance's courtroom. He is not busy right now and he is the best man to hear their case anyhow."

The steel gate swung open and an officer led the way to the room of Judge Vance. The judge was going over some papers with his clerk, but he laid them aside at once.

"Well, well! Sorry to see the uniform in a police court, boys," he said, leaning back in his chair and smiling at them. "What

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seems to be the trouble? Ahem! What is the charge, officer?"

He had suddenly leaned forward again and changed tone, becoming very judicial in demeanor. The officer recited in condensed form the charges against Limey and Bill while the judge listened.

When the officer ceased speaking the judge turned to look at the group of witnesses, now crowding into the room.

"Who is the complaining witness?" he inquired.

"Otto Wiegandt, your Honor."

"Humph! The saloon and restaurant keeper, eh? Is he here? Oh, yes! Be sworn, Mr. Wiegandt."

Pig-eye was sworn, seated in the witness chair, and started on his way through a mass of perjury. He swore stoutly that he had never meddled with Bill and Limey until they had nearly wrecked his bar and had crippled a number of his employees. Judge Vance watched the pulpy, swollen face, out of which only one eye peered and that from a slit that barely opened enough to allow the dimmest vision.

After Pig-eye came the second bartender, the first being still in the hands of the police surgeons. Other battered and bandaged faces came into the room from time to time as the trial progressed and they escaped from the surgeons.

IN THE middle of one lurid bit of testimony a form in rusty garb stole softly along the aisle to the clerk's desk, paused a moment and then turned to the judge, who gave instant attention.

"What is it, Ben?" asked the judge, beaming friendliness.

"Those papers in the Bennett case, judge," said Dr. Ben Liscomb. "They were to be signed and ready at this time."

"Why, yes! Surely! My mistake, Ben. Hand them over and I will sign them now. Go on with your testimony. I can hear you."

The judge set his name to the papers and passed them to Dr. Liscomb. The doctor leaned over the desk, glanced sidewise at the two prisoners at the bar and whispered an earnest sentence.

"Certainly, Ben," came the answer. "With all my heart. Go ahead."

Dr. Liscomb passed from the courtroom and the testimony went on. It was all against the two. Not a man had a word to say in their favor.

If the testimony of a dozen waiters, two bartenders, half a dozen loafer friends of the proprietor and the proprietor himself could be believed the Navy of the United States never held two such cases of depravity before. A ninety-nine years' sentence would be light.

The officers who had gone to the rescue of Pig-eye did not gloss over the evil reputations of Bill and Limey. They were sore and in deadly earnest in wanting a hard brand of justice meted out.

Judge Vance asked many questions of various witnesses, calling Pig-eye back to the stand for a lengthy examination, in which he was led round in a circle and made to contradict himself twice. Other witnesses were questioned, tangled, questioned again.

Then the judge called Bill to the stand.

"What is your name, quartermaster?" asked Judge Vance, smiling.

"Bill Anthony, sir."

"Ah! Long in the service, Bill?"

"In my fourth hitch, sir."

"Hmmm. Ever meet the complaining witness before, Bill?"

"Once, sir. In Seattle, four years ago, in the Pennant Saloon, sir."

"Hah! Was he employed there at the time?"

"No, sir. He was bo'sun on a German ship in harbor there."

"Uh! Anything unpleasant happen at that meeting?"

"A little that way, sir. Had a little scrap."

"So your feelings when you met today were not entirely friendly? Felt a little sore at him, eh?"

"Well, your Honor, I can't say I loved him any."

"Hmm, yes. Very likely so. Now tell the court in your own words just what happened today. Speak freely."

Testifying in short sentences, using as few words as possible, Bill related the experiences at restaurant and saloon in abridged form. He skimmed over his own prowess in fight with a phrase or two.

"Then I handed him one. About that time I blew up and went in rough-handed. That was when I got mad."

The judge nodded now and then as he listened, his eyes wandering occasionally to

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where Limey fidgeted on his seat. When Bill had ended his recital the judge nodded to Limey, who hurried to the witness stand as if impatient to begin his tale. He had to be checked in order to take the oath and as soon as it had been administered he sat down on the extreme edge of his chair and began.

"Yer Honor, this 'ere blighter of a non-com ain't did 'isself 'arf justice. 'E is so uncommon modest 'e 'olds back more'n 'e tells on 'is own side. It's like this, yer Honor."

Here Limey launched into a rapid-fire account of how Bill won his title of Missionary Bill. He told it vividly, laying stress upon the proved case against Pig-eye, of having used langauge against the flag and country that earned him all he got.

"An' that, yer Honor, is 'ow 'e come to be called Missionary Bill. An' hany bloke as knows Four Striper Gordon knows a chap 'as to be a bit of all right to wear a quarter-master's marks hunder 'im. 'E's got to know 'is dooty an' do it, an' 'e 'as to 'ave the guts.

"W'y, Four Striper Gordon would break 'is own brother if 'e ever showed 'esitation, heven, w'en dooty called. Now I hask ye, judge, ain't it proof Missionary Bill is a right sort w'en 'e 'olds on hunder a commander like that?"

"It would seem so," said the judge gravely. "But that is not all we need to know in his favor. Can you offer anything more?"

"Hi can, yer Honor. Now this 'ere same non-com is that innercent an' warm-'earted 'e needs a gardeen, fer all 'e 'as the 'ide of a bloomin' 'ippopottermus an' a rock knob on 'is neck.

"Y' see I got a missis down San Diego way an' a bit of a cottage w'ere she tykes keer o' our babies. Last year along in March I come down all muxed hup with typhoid w'en I was 'ome on furlough.

"Things was goin' bad with the missis, wot with me an' the bills an' them two gals under six, w'en our old tub comes in an' ties hup. Right hoff the 'andle comes Bill to see 'ow Hi'm comin' an' 'e sees more'n a wink than most would in a d'y.

"Well, hafter 'e'd went the missis finds a 'eap o' Uncle Sammy's iron men slipped in hunder somethin' on the dresser, an' me clear hout o' my 'ead. W'en I quit bein' balmy an' begins to talk stryte she tackles me abaht them bleedin' spukes an' we don't get now'ere till she mentions Bill com'n' in that way. Then I knowed.

"Well, yer Honor, w'en I gets back to dooty I tries to pye back 'is loocker an' 'e calls me a liar and swears 'e never left no spukes on no dresser now'ere, never. Wot could Hi do, yer Honor? I knowed 'e lied an' needed a 'idin' but there ain't men enough on board to give it 'im.

"An' that's 'im, yer Honor—Missionary Bill, the biggest bullyin' non-com in the 'ole Navy, yer Honor, with a 'eart in 'im as ain't ekaled in Hamerica.

"Has fer this 'ere feller with the haccent an' a neck like a bloomin' sea-pig, 'e wanted it an' 'e got it. Follered hus around w'en we was peaceable an' quiet as a ruddy lamb, 'e did, pickin' on hus.

"An' me 'n' Bill tykin' it 'ole till 'e cussed us because we was Navy men an' hinsulted the Navy uniform. Then Bill 'it 'im an' if 'e 'adn't old Four Striper would 'ave 'ad them jiggers hoff 'is sleeve in one-two an' 'im down on 'is marrer-bones, scrubbin' decks.

"That's the Gawd's truth, yer Honor, an' hany Navy man knows it."

A group of four had come in while Limey was testifying and when he left the stand they came forward. In the lead walked Dr. Liscomb, smiling as he piloted a boy with one arm in a sling. Back of him walked Mrs. Geiger, leading the boy Limey had pulled off the eaves.

"Your Honor, I wish to offer these character witnesses for the prisoners at the bar," said Dr. Ben in a clear voice.

"Certainly," said the judge. "Your name, madam?"

"Mrs. Ellen Geiger, your Honor."

"Be sworn, madam," and she turned to face the clerk.

WHEN Mrs. Geiger had taken the oath she looked around for her boys, meaning to give them a word of motherly admonition. They were not at her skirts nor beside Dr. Ben.

Seeing the judge looking in the prisoner's pen, she glanced that way and saw the boys perched on the knees of Missionary Bill, who looked uncomfortable over the publicity of the occasion, but very proud.

In a low voice Mrs. Geiger told of her first meeting with Bill and Limey, of the

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tenderness shown by the giant quartermaster toward her injured boy and of the sum they had left for her with Dr. Ben.

"Oh, sir, they are good men. I know they are," she said pleadingly. "Children know. You can't fool a child. They know when we are not sure ourselves.

"See how they trust the big man and love him! Your Honor, I—I—I——"

Her voice broke and tears ran down her work-worn face. Her eyes, though streaming, retained their gaze upon Bill.

"I'll pray for you every day, your Honor, if you let them go. I—I can't tell you how much like messengers of God those two sailors looked to me today. I shall love the uniform forever for the sake of two who wear it.

"P-p-please, your Honor!"

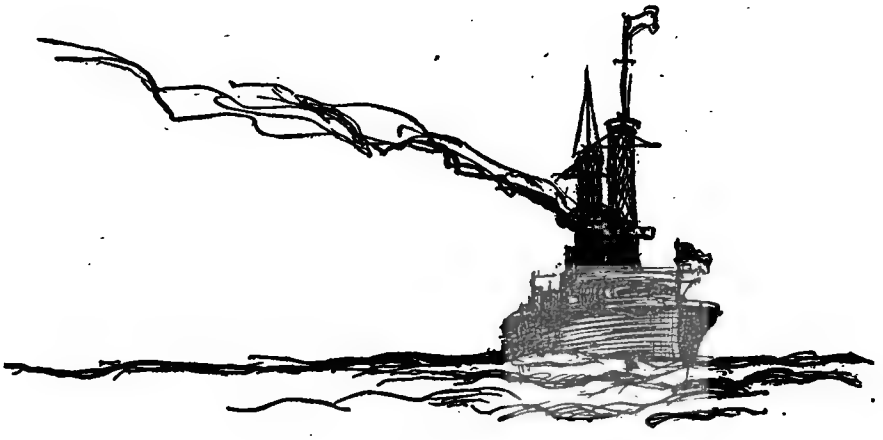
"The prisoners are discharged and the charge against them ordered expunged from the record," burst out Judge Vance, clearing his throat and winking fast. "To the complaining witness I would give a word of caution.

"You are in the United States of America, though you seem somewhat unaware of the fact. Take heed that you show respect to the uniform of its Army and Navy hereafter.

"In the judgment of the court the testimony of Henry Harris is right. You got what you went after. Take yourself and witnesses out of this court."

As Missionary Bill clasped the hand Judge Vance held out to him the judge tapped the insignia on the powerful arm.

"I served two hitches myself and wore that when I quit. Keep it clean, Bill; keep it clean."



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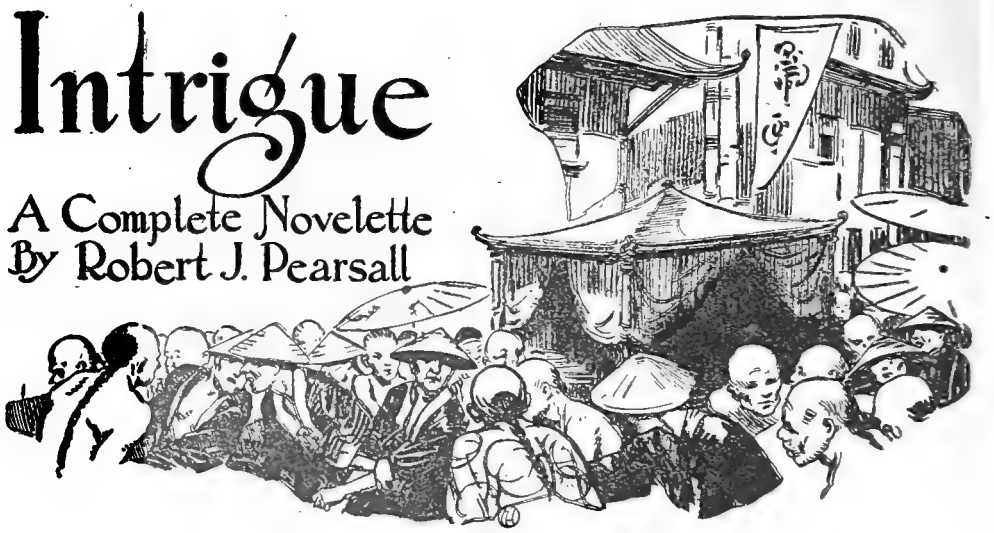
Intrigue

A Complete Novelette

By Robert J. Pearsall



Author of "Silver Sycees," "Ming Gold," etc.

THE whole province of Kiangsi quivered with uncertainty—the politically pivotal section of China emerged from its lethargy awake. Coming out of the uncrowded west, Hazard and I had found its villages full of whisperings, its roads lined with men of unexplained business, everything corroborative of the rumor which had fetched us, that the world's master trouble-maker, Koshinga, was about to launch there his last and greatest trouble. Four days loitering there had convinced us of the truth of the rumor.

But it had convinced us of little else. Rooted in secrecy, the centuries-old organization of the revolutionary Ko Lao Hui *tong* still worked behind an impenetrable yellow veil. Moreover, the East is never so inscrutable as when it is most active, because it never acts save with forethought, guard up; and it is only when the East is off guard that the West can hope to match its wit.

We found Nanchang a very wallow of life, its always overcrowded streets fairly boiling with the influx of strangers. A chance migration, workingmen looking for work, traders for trade—what not? This was the surface explanation.

On the other hand, we saw nothing to shake our belief that these men were Ko Lao Hui, packing the province for revolt. Underneath, insidious propaganda was working, the preachment of racial hatred, the delusion of the ignorant by the promise of world mastery, the alluring of the base by the offering of unearned wealth.

And behind all this we felt the mind of Koshinga—that Koshinga who was at once the fulfilment of a prophecy and a symbol of world dominion, deracialized, very nearly dehumanized, and a genius in crime.

The great plot to overthrow the Chinese government and to unite all Asia under his autocratic leadership was coming to a head. Manifestly the success of this plot would bring to the Western world such a peril as it has never met.

But we were sure it would hardly begin as a straightaway revolt. Koshinga's brain was too devious for that; the sledge of his power—he had by now many millions of followers—would be preceded by the cutting edge of his cunning. And besides, as Hazard said our first night in the inaptly named Inn of Heavenly Peace:

"There are many sections of China where the Ko Lao Hui are stronger than they are here. The mass of Kiangsi is loyal enough, and what means more it's sober-minded.

"The native Ko Lao Hui are riffraff, and these newcomers are froth. Why would Koshinga start his revolution here?

"We have to grant him cleverness. We have to assume that he has something up his sleeve—something to catch the mass that hasn't yet been caught."

It seemed most likely, and it was only

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in that event that Hazard and I could be of any use. Black-bearded, with forty feet each of scarlet silk wound about our heads and with our faces dyed dark-brown—so little does it take to turn a white man into a Sikh—we watched and listened and asked no questions, for we had learned that in China the greater the need is of information the wiser the policy of non-inquisitiveness.

Keeping away from *yamens*, where we would have had to reveal our identities, we prowled the cluttered streets and sat hour after hour in the crowded eating-places. And so we learned at least one significant thing.

Three governors of Kiangsi had recently died as rapidly as they could be appointed from Peking. Assuming that they had been murdered, suspicion pointed straight to Koshinga, for he was ruler of the lawless everywhere, obeyed as few kings are, and behind most crimes of magnitude in China. Also, according to the talk of the people, they had died as if stricken by devils with not a mark or sign to show the cause—which again suggested Koshinga, adept in mysterious disposals of those that stood in his way.

But it seemed that the direct perpetrator of these crimes had been destroyed. The present governor, a trusted official who had been sent down from the northern capital with absolute power over the unquiet province, had been attacked in his audience chamber by his secretary, Ho Shih Chang. This secretary had also served all three of the murdered men.

The governor had saved his life only by killing his assailant, whose body he had left as it had fallen—this was a touch of Oriental callousness—with the head over a brazier of hot coals, so that those who came later could recognize Ho Shih Chang's corpse only by the clothing he had worn.

There was much street talk about this dead secretary, whose personality seemed to have been more notable than his office. Among other things it was said that he had been enamored of the daughter of the city's chief magistrate, Liu Po Wen, whom many blamed for extravagant modernism in that he had given that daughter a foreign education.

Furthermore it was said that he had actually left the matter of Ho Shih Chang's suit to the girl herself; and that upon her refusal to consider it and Ho Shih Chang's importunate advances, he had forbidden the latter his compound. Which tale, considering the secretary's death, could hardly possess any further meaning; but it was a kernel of information that stuck in our minds.

And the story of the murders itself was not without its problem.

"If Ho Shih Chang murdered the other three governors so skilfully," questioned Hazard, "why did he change to such a clumsy method with the fourth? And if he wasn't the assassin why isn't this present governor killed, too? Why isn't he killed in any case, since we know Koshinga could find another instrument in the *yamen*?

"There's something peculiar about this, Partridge. Can it be that Koshinga is at last satisfied? That would mean that the present governor's gone over to the Ko Lao Hui, and——"

"But that's pretty nearly impossible," I objected. "We know that Peking's given the governor more power than it's ever put in one man's hands before. So far as settling this Ko Lao Hui business he's left absolutely free with full power to bind the government to anything. And the President and his advisers aren't such fools as to give such authority to any one that hasn't been proven safe."

"True enough," said Hazard; "but that isn't answering my question. We'll remember them."

SO OUR first four days in Nanchang were like standing before an opaque curtain behind which we dimly sensed that things were moving swiftly. It's true we got vagrant glimpses off-scene, as it were; but these were always of things that we should have known were happening without these glimpses.

For instance we learned that guns to arm his followers were being run into Kiangsi from Koshinga's secret storage places in the west, but his Kiangsi hiding-places remined a secret.

And we gathered from snatches of talk in the bazaars that the date of the uprising was fixed, and that it was not far away. But of the exact date and manner of it we could learn nothing—and particularly we could learn nothing of that plot within a plot which we were sure Koshinga was

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contriving to catch the support of the soldier element.

"For he must have them," Hazard kept repeating. "There are several thousand soldiers in the province, a small enough number but good troops. Can you imagine Koshinga not making an attempt to infect them? There's intrigue on foot—but where?"

If we could have discovered any Ko Lao Hui meeting-place or council we would have made a frontal attack on the secret by attempting to enter it. A few months before, far back in the mountains of Lololand, we had escaped from a trap set for us by Koshinga with a certain Ko Lao Hui symbol the power of which we hadn't yet tested. It was a small dagger which was evidently some centuries old, but which had Koshinga's indescribably terrible face engraved on it line for line exactly as it had been prophesied by the founder of the society—a complete mystery in itself which we hoped some day to solve.

We knew it was no complete pass to the Ko Lao Hui secrets; but we also knew it was supposed to be in the possession only of men high in the order. It would have been worth while trying how far it would have carried us, and we had it with us always; but no way opened for the trial.

So we paltered about, fretting ourselves, smelling the coming storm and soaking up what knowledge we could, however irrelevant it seemed. Where a mystery is complete there is no telling what may prove an angle to it.

Once we got a glimpse of the present governor—his eyes blue—spectacled, his face still bandaged from Ho Shih Chang's attack—as he made his way out of his *yamen* in his ceremonial palanquin and robes of office. And once we heard a completely mystifying snatch of conversation between two men who we felt sure were past the initiatory stage in the Ko Lao Hui, as they sipped *samshu* in a nefarious drinking-joint.

"First the foreign soldiers must be destroyed," said one.

"It is written," said the other. "Their burial place will be the gullets of the mountain birds. I have seen it in the plan of Him-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed."

That was all, heard in an unexpected lull of the human clamor that filled the place; and by the time we got closer to them they had developed caution and were talking about commonplace things. But what was the meaning of it, save that Koshinga as usual was keeping his person out of the danger zone? We knew for a certainty that there were no foreign soldiers in Kiangsi.

But there is no riddle without a key, it being essentially the key that makes the riddle. Finally, from quite an unexpected quarter we got the clue that we knew would come in time, if the time to the denouement of Koshinga's plot were long enough.

It was the early morning of a day that promised to be sweltering; and we were walking down a smelly alley beween mud-and-stone-walled compounds on our way to the thronging streets of shops, the noise of which was already in our ears like a hive of bees at swarming time.

Ahead of us was a cross-street leading to this business section, filled with yellow men who laughed while they wrangled briskly, and other slant-eyed, silent groups whose faces said nothing at all. Suddenly Hazard, watching this passing stream, whispered to me without turning his head:

"Hello, who have we here? D'you see that man, Partridge?"

"Who?"

"That white man, straight ahead."

"Yes, I see him. By ——," I cried with quickened interest, "it's Lomond!"

"Are you sure, Partridge?"

"Lomond it is. Now why——"

It was unnecessary to complete the question. It was quite plain that our immediate business now became to discover the reason for the presence in Nanchang of that man whom we had seen but once before, in Shanghai a year ago, but of whom we had heard much that was not flattering.

Paradoxically his presence cried out for explanation the more in that it seemed so natural that he should be here.

Tall and felinely graceful, clad in white duck, sallow-skinned, thin featured, fox-eyed, he was the one man of our own race whom we might expect to find preceding the vultures upon any scene of trouble. This from his reputation, for he was a diplomatic agent in the lowest sense of the word, whose machinations had in evey case of which we had heard resulted disastrously to the Chinese government.

Something had always gone wrong, and

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hat not always from the fault of the particular foreign power he happened to represent. Hazard and I had once commented on the fact that his ill-luck apparently natched his crookedness.

"But he's a shark's pilot-fish for all hat," said Hazard, after we had recalled ll this in a few swift sentences. "I wonder what particular government's backing aim now."

To that there was no answer, for Lomond had in the past changed his allegiance very often. For instance there was the Hupeh deal, the affair of the Kingan railroad concessions, and the matter of extra-territorial rights in Sianfu—all of them ill-fated and in each of which he had represented a different principal.

But I wouldn't have replied in any case, for by that time we had reached the crowded street down which Lomond had passed—a narrow and dirty street with dilapidated dwellings of wood, stone, mud and canvas huddling close along its length. Lomond might have been within ear-shot; but after a moment we discovered his white-clad figure picking its way with a suggestion of fastidiousness through the yellow swarm ahead of us.

W followed him without further conversation. Alley gave upon square and square upon broader street; and still Lomond walked quickly and without hesitation, like a man who keeps his destination well in mind.

Not once did he look behind, but if he had he would hardly have noticed us. Certainly he would not have noticed Hazard, who managed to supplement his disguise as a Hong Kong Sihk policeman on leave with a second mask of utter mediocrity. It was a peculiarity of Hazard's that he could make himself as unnoticeable against any background as a coiled blacksnake upon a rock; but his senses were keen as a blacksnake's, too, and when he chose he could move as swiftly.

Presently we came to a place of shops pressing out upon the middle of the thoroughfare. Great rectangular signs covered with huge black hieroglyphics fronted these shops; and the way was still further obstructed by tinkers' stands and chow-stalls and a motley collection of street merchants, fat and lean, vying vociferously for patronage.

Where these were not, were long lines of wheelbarrows and rickshaws whose possessors assailed us with shrill cries. The narrow way left was filled with a sweating throng of human beings, chattering and singing unmelodiously; and over all rose the short, staccato cries of the street venders:

"*Yu-sa kuei*" (pastry).

"*Tong-yu-nang*" (spiced potatoes).

"*Ung-hsiang-tou*" (five-flavored beans).

Business was proceeding briskly, for the Chinese so combine the commercial instinct with even nerves that they would buy and sell on the hour next the end of the world. Yet here and there Hazard and I still caught those vagrant signs to which our four days in Nanchang had accustomed us. There were subtly meaningful expressions in a language well adapted to hint and parable and innuendo—a whole story caught in a phrase which yet added nothing to our knowledge.

Once we heard some one start humming almost beneath his breath the "Song of the Ko Lao Hui"—that fierce revolutionary chantey which, when sung by a number, is so like a tiger's yowl against a distant drumming. But instantly there was a sharp word and the sound of a blow; the singer was silenced, probably by a wiser brother of the *tong*. The time for that song was not yet; silence and secrecy was Koshinga's word.

NOW Lomond took to loafing as if he had discovered that he was early to an appointment. He sauntered from stall to stall, examining much and buying nothing, and we imitated him.

Finally he turned into the Street of Lanterns, the principal thoroughfare across the city from east to west. Here an occasional sedan-chair made way with difficulty through the crush, its bearers pushing, arguing, cajoling, scolding, with an effective mixture of good-nature and effrontery. And it was with one of these chairs that the next significant occurrence which we observed on this lucky morning had to do.

On a certain stretch of street the crowd had thickened as flies gather on food—had thickened and grown ruffian in appearance.

In it were many "strangers from afar," "men with a mission," tall fighting Mongols from the north, wiry Cantonese with cunning faces, swarthy, fanatical Taoist

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from Shensi—for to the Taoist hierarchy Koshinga had promised much.

Apparently there was something on foot; if these men were there without intention their appearance belied them; they lounged and loitered as if deliberately adding to the congestion of the street.

Lomond had stopped before a stall in which trained hawks and Mongolian crows were exhibited for sale. Hazard and I pretended to examine some pottery at a stall not far away.

While we were so engaged there came the sound of a small commotion in the middle of the street just behind Lomond's back. A couple of coolies had fallen into a squabble; they had thrust their faces close together and were hissing taunts at each other like two furious snakes.

As Hazard and I turned they fell into a clutch. This was not uncommon, and it was curious the way men jammed in toward them from all sides, so that in an instant the street was a wriggling mass of would-be onlookers.

A richly decorated sedan-chair, all yellow and blue, had been approaching with much difficulty from down-town. Now it stopped, swaying with the crowd like a boat in the trough of the waves.

Its six liveried bearers uttered short cries as they tried to go forward. But instead of giving way the mob pressed in on them. That is, the most ruffianly of its members did.

And Hazard and I heard the cries of the bearers of the chair take on a note of fear.

"By the Lord," muttered Hazard, "I think ——"

Just to our left was an itinerant barber with his doubly useful box—a receptacle for his tools, a seat for his customers. Hazard passed him a few copper tungtses and we crowded together on top of the box.

So we were able to look over the heads of the crowd, and a moment later to see a strange incident which just then was without explanation, without beginning or end, a flashing glimpse into the human kaleidoscope which surrounded us.

Six men, caparisoned exactly as were the bearers of the chair, had appeared out of the edge of the mob—one at each bearer's elbow. From its effect it was a magical word which each of these men whispered in a bearer's ear, for instantly and as if frightened the original bearers abandoned their poles, or rather they transferred them to the shoulders of these false bearers, and immediately the chair was under way again. The coolies' squabble was forgotten, the crowd parted like water before the chair, and it passed us at a jogging trot.

And it was then we learned its owner's name from the great yellow characters which sprawled across the jackets of both the original and the false bearers:

LIU PO WEN.

Liu Po Wen, the father of the girl who had been sought after by Ho Shih Chang—he who had died by the hand of the governor whom he had tried to kill!

"Um!" grunted Hazard. "Now if Ho Shih Chang were still alive this might be understood. The East is as violent in love as the West—more so, sometimes. But as it stands ——"

His voice trailed off. He had glanced toward the bird-stall and found that Lomond had disappeared.

It must have annoyed him, but without change of countenance he began pressing his way through the almost solid pack that had closed in behind the car—or rather percolating through it, for Hazard possessed to an inimitable degree the capacity to win his way through a press without opposition or antagonism.

I followed in his wake, and we located Lomond just as he was disappearing through the door of a teahouse a little farther down the street.

II

"IF YE seek, enter a teahouse," runs a Chinese proverb—a true saying. The teahouse is Asia's free meeting-place and market, where one may sell one's soul or buy another's.

The name itself is a euphemism, covering all things from the serving of *magie-lu* and the fierier *saujo* to theatrical performances that are not nice and the purveying of goods, and conspiracy to murder. The teahouse is the great common denominator of men, a place where mandarin and bandit may meet as equals and in secrecy—a throw-off for the social instinct and a hatchery of mischief.

A guttural roar of human voices smote

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our ears as Hazard and I entered this teahouse after Lomond. This roar was not loud, but it was deep and powerful—five hundred men grunted, mumbled, talked and laughed and took their drinks in a space so crowded that bare shoulder pressed against bare shoulder everywhere.

Stripped to the waist, the Chinese filled the wooden benches that lined the common room from end to end. Others stood, and plumped themselves down quickly whenever a sitter arose.

In the aggregate it was a scene of Gargantuan drinking; individually the men may have averaged the expenditure of an American cent. The smell that came from the sweating throng was an affront to the nostrils.

Here was Asia, alive, pulsating, before our eyes—but here was also Lomond. He had turned to the left from the entrance and had reached the row of thin-walled bamboo stalls that had been built for the use of the better class along that side of the place.

His thin face, hook-nosed, powerful-jawed, was as impassive and ugly as a gargoyle's. He moved confidently and unhesitatingly forward, but when he was half-way down the side of the room a full-gowned and imposing-looking Chinaman in a tasseled hat rose and stood in Lomond's path as if he were on guard.

Perhaps a word passed between them. At any rate the Chinaman drew back instantly and let Lomond pass. Lomond went on a little farther, opened the door of one of the little stalls, entered it and drew the door shut behind him rather hurriedly.

"One of the adjoining stalls—if we can make it," whispered Hazard.

I nodded, but with no particular hope that Lomond would be stupid enough to leave only a bamboo wall between him and a possible hearer—that is, assuming that he went to a secret interview. And we were yet six paces from the room into which Lomond had gone when the same dark-gowned, tassel-capped Chinaman blocked our own way.

"The foreign mandarins will please to command the services of my miserable place of thirst-quenching," he murmured, clasping and shaking his own hands in salutation.

And the next moment he had opened the door of a stall that attracted us not at all, and stood immovable, inviting us to enter.

Now the will of the Orient, expressed thus politely, is really like a stone wall padded with many cushions. Whether Lomond's wish or another's were controlling him, this man was fully determined that we should get no closer to our quarry.

Bribery might win him, but was equally likely to fail; what was really needed was a more extraordinary persuasion—and it was quite natural that I should think of that dagger inside my coat, the handle of which was shaped in the horrific likeness of our enemy, Koshinga.

The eyes of the teahouse proprietor were already fastened respectfully on the breast of my khaki jacket. I slipped my hand inside it and drew two inches of that dagger out from its hiding-place, holding it so that no one but the man who barred our passage could see it.

The result by no means proved him to be a Ko Lao Hui, for the symbol of that gigantic *tong* was very often feared and obeyed where it was most hated; but the Chinaman blinked uncertainly and bewilderedly. Very probably it puzzled him greatly to find that dagger in the hands of two turbaned Sihks; but Hazard and I gave him no time to recover from his weakening hesitation.

We brushed quickly past him; and Hazard flung back an order to him that we were on no account to be approached or disturbed—such an order as I suppose he had already received concerning Lomond and his confrère.

And the next moment he was kowtowing profoundly to our backs as we passed through the door next that which Lomond had entered, placing our felt-slippered feet like cats.

The place was just large enough to contain a rude table around which four men might seat themselves. Under the edge of the table were Chinese stools, two of which Hazard and I moved soundlessly against the wall behind which we knew was Lomond. Lomond and who else? Or had the other party to this guarded interview arrived?

We seated ourselves on the stools, facing each other, and placed our ears against the wall, hoping fervently that Hazard's order against interruption would be respected.

Immediately we heard a sound that was hard to define, but which might have been the crinkling of leaves of parchment. Then

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a page of it was turned and folded back, unmistakably.

Probably it was my knowledge of Lomond's business that made me so certain that he was intently studying a tape-tied document. Then some one was with him, some one who had given him that document—and still there was no certainty until after about ten minutes Lomond spoke.

We had heard his voice once, and could never mistake it—flat, toneless, and as vacant of human emotion as the face of the central image in the Taoist Temple of Torture.

"It is well," he said in the Mandarin dialect. "It should satisfy."

"Your servant is persuaded that it will," replied a more flexible Chinese voice. "It is done with all authority."

I glanced at Hazard. His rather commonplace face was unchanged save for his eyes, which were half-closed and blankly intent. He looked like an expert hunter who senses his game before he perceives it; and I knew he could be trusted to pounce upon whatever we should hear, and tear out of it every vestige of meaning.

As for me, I was rather illogically elated. The few words we had heard might mean anything; nevertheless I was sure we were touching the fringe of Koshinga's plot at last. That feeling is hard to explain; it is like the faint premonitory lessening of darkness that precedes the glimmer of light when one nears the end of a tunnel.

After a moment Lomond spoke again:

"Yes, it is a good bargain. It is said that there is enough coal under Kiangsi to feed the furnaces of the world for a century.

"And who will notice the sending of two companies into the province in the present disturbed state of the world? As you know, it is practically agreed upon by my government, provided I secure for it this pledge."

"It is done then," replied the Chinaman. "Five hundred men—it is a small pawn in a great game. Your servant begs that you will make all haste, for the hour of Koshinga's blow is near."

So! I was mistaken then. This was a counterplot to Koshinga's—or was it?

Five hundred soldiers—what a handful against the forces of Koshinga! Pawns would they be in truth if Koshinga learned of their coming, and that in a sense not understood by Lomond.

But the parchment was crackling again, and that sound was accompanied by another, as if Lomond was at once rising and putting away his precious document. Evidently the interview was to be of the shortest.

"I should be given every assistance," resumed Lomond's voice. "From here I go to the Inn of Munificent Promise, where I shall remain until the third hour after midnight.

"Then I shall start for Foochow, where are the exalted battle-ships of my government. A guard should be provided me, with facilities for swift traveling.

"To Foochow is four days by pony caravan. There will be a delay for talk, and the soldiers will travel more slowly; but in nine days more they should arrive by the route that has been agreed upon."

"All will be seen to. May your efforts prosper."

Then into the Chinese voice there seemed to creep an almost imperceptible and very puzzling note of derision.

"May the honorable foreign soldiers live long," he murmured. "May the earth evil called the Ko Lao Hui wither before them."

POLITELY and without seeming to notice anything strange in the other's tone Lomond led off on the ceremonial formulas that must precede their parting. By this we knew that they were to leave the room in inverse order to that in which they had entered it, Lomond first. So we waited in silence until their door opened and closed again and Lomond's leather-shod feet passed outside our own.

Then Hazard beckoned me away from the wall. By this time I had digested what we had heard pretty well, and was not particularly surprized at the intensity of Hazard's expression.

If both of us had not been accustomed to build much on slight things seen and overheard we should hardly have lasted as long as we had in our fight against Koshinga's wily intellect; and it was now fairly clear to me that my first thought concerning the meaning of this interview had been correct.

We had not only touched the fringe of Koshinga's plot, but had penetrated it entirely; only it was so infernally subtle

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as to be almost imperceivable. For instance, Lomond—seasoned international go-between as he was—had seemingly not perceived it.

"Of course you understand?" Hazard's whisper barely carried to my ears.

"I think so. The scheme we suspected—to turn the people against Peking."

"Exactly. Invasion by foreign troops—what government can stand that invites it? And the surrender in return of the Kiangsi coal-deposits—even more damning! But of course Peking knows nothing about it.

"This man in the next room is a Ko Lao Hui agent posing as a government official. Only I can't see how he's been able to carry off the imposture with Lomond."

"Crook's wit," I replied. "You remember all his schemes have fallen through somehow."

"What diabolical treachery!" Hazard murmured, the muscles of his usually impassive face tightening. "For that isn't all of it. You remember what we heard from those *samshu* drinkers about the destruction of the foreign soldiers. Now we know what they meant.

"Koshinga lures these soldiers in; then he'll destroy them. Peking gets in bad with whatever government they belong to, while Koshinga takes credit with the people, bolsters up his pose as China's great patriot. What a devil's plot! And it would have succeeded if we hadn't happened to be here."

"But how can we spoil it?"

"Easy enough. Notify the government, have Lomond arrested, find out what he knows about this man who's tricked him. But he's going. Let's try and see ——"

We tiptoed to the door. That other door had opened, and the man whom we had labeled Koshinga's agent was passing out. We gave him time almost to reach the exit of the teahouse, then stepped quietly out into the steaming common room and looked after him.

When I saw him I had hard work to suppress a groan. Hazard touched my arm and we backed into the room again. He closed the door, drew two stools together, and we sat down facing each other across the corner of the table—all this in a bewildered and incredulous silence, which Hazard was first to break.

"The governor himself," he breathed rather dully. "The governor of Kiangsi! Did you recognize him too, Partridge?"

"Yes. The governor in plain Mandarin robes meeting Lomond here secretly—and no wonder, for neither would want their connection known."

"But it is inconceivable," said Hazard after a long pause. "It is inconceivable that a man should be so stupid."

"Well," I said, trying to speak composedly, "when a mistake is so grave that its discoverers read in it a plot against its maker's own power, then it's about time—"

"It's about time," interrupted Hazard, seeming to grip all his faculties with an effort, "to take one's reckoning again, and from a new tangent. Just how much do we know of this tangle after all? Let me think."

He leaned back, folded his arms and closed his eyes, his chin falling forward on his chest—a way he had when he wished to cast off all disturbing stimuli and to apply to a problem that spirit of pure reason which he so often lauded as man's best guide.

As for me, my reason had pretty well defaulted before our discovery. There is nothing so incurable as stupidity in high places, and if the governor himself was so blind as to play directly into Koshinga's hands then there was nothing we could do to save him.

For of course Koshinga with his unequaled system of espionage would discover this thing—indeed the words of the *samshu* drinkers indicated that he had discovered it beforehand, and had already planned to take advantage of it. The whole empire would be stirred by the government's betrayal of this one province; Koshinga's cleverly advertised activities in opposition would win him millions of new adherents; and red riot and ruin would result.

Presently Hazard spoke slowly and with an air of detachment:

"Now to get back to first principles, from which we've strayed a long way. What's certain and what isn't?

"It's certain Koshinga's brewing revolution, for one thing. It's almost certain Koshinga's hand was in the killing of the three governors preceding this one—concerning the manner of which killing, by the way, we know nothing yet.

"It's also almost certain that they were

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killed by his secretary, Ho Shih Chang—his attack on the present governor is evidence of that. But that would seem to prove that the present governor's death had also been ordered by Koshinga—but here we find him playing Koshinga's game for him.

"Well, he is merely a fool then. But would Peking be likely to give a fool the dictatorship of Kiangsi?"

"As likely as they would be to send down a traitor," I said. "But they've done one or the other, we know."

"Ah, but suppose they haven't. Let's consider that they haven't. Let's consider that they did what we should expect them to do, that they sent down a loyal official and an intelligent one."

"But that's impossible," I objected, "for this man——"

"Nothing's impossible," Hazard interrupted. "Consider the combinations possible in a deck of cards and then try to conceive of the infinite variety of combinations in the human deck of some billions of people, all different. Nothing's impossible.

"But let's stick to the point. These two suppositions are facts, say. The key to the riddle is there—there!

"Now what do we find? What do we know—what else do we know that will help? Let me think!"

I was getting a glimpse into Hazard's mental processes, into the methods that made him the most efficient solver of human problems that I have ever seen. Thus he would nail a supposition to the wall of his mind; he would study it; he would group around it all the known facts, trying out its relationships, testing its explanatory powers, creating from his imagination other possibilities and so attempting to create an orderly and self-proving whole.

This mental jugglery was kaleidoscopic in swiftness, microscopic in exactness and usually unfailing in results. Where there was a riddle there was a key, though the finding sometimes took weeks; but now at the end of five minutes:

"By ——!" he cried suddenly. "I have it."

The impact of the idea acted upon him like an electrical shock. The front legs of his stool came down to the earthen floor with a thud. In the same movement he leaped to his feet with leopard-like swiftness; and he towered over me, leaning forward, ready for action as a bent spring.

I stared up at him.

"I have it," he repeated, yielding to one of his very rare fits of excitement, "and there's no time to be lost. Fool that I was, not to see at once——

"Partridge, we've been lucky, lucky! And to think that I nearly failed to take advantage of our luck, nearly failed to see how that episode of the abducted sedan-chair dovetails completely into this which we've called a mystery—how it explains everything! Come, we must go to the *yamen*."

"To Liu Po Wen's *yamen?*" I asked with my mind busy trying to reconstruct that street episode which I had almost forgotten.

"No; to the governor's," corrected Hazard. "For don't you see— But first——"

He broke off, jerking his head backward in the way he had when he was retracing the steps of his reasoning. For a moment he tattooed nervously with his knuckles on the table, his eyes fixed on vacancy. Then—

"First," he said in quite his normal voice, "we must write a letter."

Then he drew from an inner pocket of his coat a fountain pen, a pad of paper and an envelope. Sitting down, he addressed the envelope to Lomond at the Inn of Munificent Promise and then scratched a note hastily. When he had finished he handed it to me. It read:

> When you would deal with a man, be careful he has authority. When you would shear a sheep, be careful a wolf is not hidden under the fleece. These trite Chinese sayings have particular reference to your arrangements made this hour with the governor of Kiangsi.
>
> This is written not out of any regard for yourself, but in some consideration for the five hundred good men whom you would unknowingly betray to death. If you would know how you have been duped, be in the governor's *yamen* within an hour.

I looked up from the note bewilderedly.

"But the governor *has* authority." I objected. "Peking gave him plenipotentiary power."

"It did," said Hazard, "and yet—he hasn't it."

The sentence was enigmatic, but he suddenly developed a hurry that precluded

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any further questioning. This was not altogether like Hazard, who usually proceeded deliberately upon a scent.

His haste and consequent silence suited me not at all ill, the satisfaction of curiosity being such a keen delight to me that I am not averse to having the process well spread out. But I remember thinking at the time that such haste might easily be dangerous; and indeed the next minute Hazard perpetrated one of the very few mistakes I ever knew him to make.

He despatched the note to Lomond by the hand of a reliable teahouse runner, Then we left the teahouse for the street, and almost immediately were in rickshaws on our way to the governor's *yamen*.

III

THE Summer's sun was blazing noon-high by now, and dust added to the city's discomfort—din, dust and packed humanity, a riot of strange smells and noise and color beneath a savage sky. We passed quickly into the district of the lower order of shops; and here the Ko Lao Hui, easy to be picked from their idleness and the vice on their faces, were as thick as yellow-jacketed wasps gathering for a feast of meat.

Everywhere they were grouped together, slant eyes speaking devilry, twisted brains plotting murder. This was unmistakable—and there were other signs.

One sign was the scarcity in the streets of women and children—always and everywhere the chief sufferers in such an upheaval as was promised. Nor did it need keenness of vision to see that much of the law-abiding populace hung in the strain of a great uncertainty, debating furtively toward which side it would be safest to throw its strength in the coming struggle—no cowardice, this, but a lesson of self-preservation learned in much civil conflict.

The Oriental is a callous breed, and wild animals fighting to the death are not so mad nor so inhuman as he can be in his hour of victory.

Koshinga understood this well; and when he struck he would strike hard, and with the momentum of that first blow might carry all Kiangsi before him. And Hazard and I knew well that Kiangsi was but an outpost of our enemy, or rather a key-rock to that empire-wide avalanche which Koshinga had planned an—avalanche which, once started, would crush millions.

Could that key-rock be held in place, loyal to the republic? As our rickshaw men edged and wormed and worried their way through the tortuous maze of streets—so symbolic of the workings of their makers' minds—I found myself doubting it greatly.

The tinder was ready for the spark; the fuse had been laid and almost lighted, and nothing stood in the way of the conflagration but what Hazard and I had learned and what we might do. And now it seemed quite clear to me that we ourselves could do nothing.

Mull the matter over in my mind as I would, I could not even divine what errand we could possibly have in the governor's *yamen*. That was as impossible for me to understand as was the matter of Hazard's note to Lomond—a note which, as I now saw, contradicted the very premises upon which Hazard had based his reasoning.

Starting out by assuming the intelligence and integrity of the governor, he had ended by accusing him of duping Lomond and consequently betraying his own government, and by implication of betraying into the hands of Koshinga the foreign expedition whose intervention he himself had authorized. And Hazard's act in warning and summoning Lomond proved that whatever the object of our present errand it was based on the assumption that the latter characterization of the governor was the correct one.

It proved one other fact, and a very disquieting one. Whatever else was true, we were going to the *yamen* of the man in whose hands lay all Kiangsi, to this governor of the strangely dual personality, not as friends, but as enemies. *Yamen* walls contain many secrets, and once inside them we would be in his power.

If he were Ko Lao Hui as well as governor we would be doubly in his power. Once he had learned our identities he would have only to pass along his knowledge in order to rid himself of us, and us of the world, there being many thousands of Ko Lao Hui in Nanchang who would take more than an even chance of death for the reward Koshinga had offered for our killing. I wondered if Hazard had thought of that.

Well, the best way out is usually forward. By now we had passed from the turbulent business section; and I leaned

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back in my rickshaw and watched the long brown compound walls topped with broken glass as we spun slowly past them.

Piercing these walls at intervals were great arched doorways beyond which one got glimpses of courtyards decorated with vases and flowers and an occasional forest tree. We had passed into the wealthier residence section, restricted and exclusive, yet over which the yellow destroying flood might presently be pouring.

Hereabout was our destination; and presently the coolies rounded a certain corner, and I found myself alighting before the great, dragon-decorated gate of the *yamen*.

Hazard's method in atttaining the governor's presence was peculiar and would hardly have worked anywhere but in China, where officials are proverbially at their servants' mercy concerning privacy and all conduct of business.

The master of the porters' lodge came out kowtowing low. Hazard led him aside, and a sum that equaled six months of the servant's pay passed between their fingers.

Then Hazard showed him a strongly worded government document directing all citizens of China to assist us, at the same time whispering vigorously in the porter's ears. The porter's eyes blinked respectfully at sight of the screed; but immediately a controversy seemed to arise between them.

Hazard insisted upon entering; the porter objected. Hazard started up the stone walk that led from this gate to the second compound with the porter backing away before him, gesticulating and disputatiously jabbering—but not too violently.

I followed Hazard, appreciating the trick but with some forebodings as to its effect upon the governor. Evidently Hazard wished to take the governor unaware, while the porter was at once earning his bribe, obeying the government order Hazard had showed him and saving his "face" concerning his duty to his master—leading us to the governor by the very act of disputing our passage.

Other *yamen* servants, getting the cue somehow, discreetly turned their backs—which easy compliance with the deception in no way altered my conviction that any of them would do murder at their master's command. And in this fashion we passed through three stone-walled, tile-floored courtyards, and finally came to a heavy wooden door in the inner wall of the third.

Beyond this door was a fifty-foot corridor between high walls unbroken by doors or windows. As soon as we entered this corridor the porter gave up pretense of opposition and began pounding at another heavy door at the farther end of it.

Hazard and I followed more slowly; and though in China it's no hyperbole to say that walls have ears I chanced the whisper:

"That was clever, Hazard, if you wanted to catch the governor off guard. But hardly if you care for his good-will. Men have been given the *lingchi* (death by slicing) for less than this in the old days."

"The old days that aren't so old after all," replied Hazard, who had again added to his Sikh's disguise the deceptive mask of the commonplace. "There's a lot I'd like to tell you, but it isn't safe, and I'll only say this: the governor's good-will is an absent quantity. From now, Partridge, it's blade against blade; but——"

WE WERE too close to the door, against which the porter was still hammering, for further talk. It was however at least a minute before a wicket in the middle of the door opened inward, and the governor himself peered out, his face still heavily bandaged, but this time with his eyes unspectacled.

He demanded what was wanted in a voice which was surprizingly angry even before he observed Hazard and me standing behind the porter. Hazard pressed the porter aside and answered the question himself, declaring our identities in a whisper and taking all blame off the porter's shoulders as far as words could do it.

It was most important that we should see the governor at once, Hazard declared, for we had a thing to report that affected the governor closely and that could not be delayed. And since it was Peking's command—Hazard emphasized that word—that all officials should assist us we begged an instant audience.

Did the governor hesitate before admitting us? I thought so. But if I had learned at all to read the voice and manner of the Oriental there were other emotions agitating him that were harder to explain.

For instance, after he had dismissed the

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porter, opened the door and bowed us in I was sure I caught a secret anxious glance from his beady and somewhat overbright eyes toward a second door which opened from the rear of the chamber. Also there was a contradictory eagerness in his reception of us, which gave me the impression that he regarded us as enemies delivered by a fortunate fate into his hands.

A large ironwood desk stood near the middle of the room, well out of line with the two doors, so that a man sitting behind it could easily observe both entrances—the usual arrangement in the cautious East. The governor took his chair; and at his ceremonious invitation Hazard and I seated ourselves upon a sort of bench which was fastened permanently to the floor just in front of his desk.

These were the only articles of furniture in the room, which was small and somewhat suggestive of a prison cell, lighted as it was by four small, iron-barred windows which had been set into the heavy stone walls just below the low ceiling of unfinished wood.

NOW that we were here Hazard did not seem inclined to hurry matters. I thought he was probably timing the conversation to suit the probable arrival of Lomond, which could not be long delayed, Lomond's inn being only a short distance from the teahouse from which Hazard had sent the summoning message.

At any rate he held the talk to discussion of the Ko Lao Hui activities, concerning which neither said anything that the other might not have been expected to know, until after about fifteen minutes of circumlocution Hazard turned for a subject to the deaths of the governor's three predecessors.

"Concerning that," said the governor, "there is no doubt that the doer of the deed was the infamous Ho Shih Chang, whom I killed, wherefore I still remain alive; nor is there doubt that back of the deed was the will of Koshinga. But the manner of it is still beyond explanation.

"It was in this room that all three were found dead, and it was as if a devil had entered into them, for there was no mark nor sign to show the manner of their killing. Doubtless there was an end to the method, or Ho Shih Chang would not have attacked me with his hands."

Hazard asked several questions rather idly, and productive of nothing. There was no doubt he was also using his eyes, and I wondered if he was equally at a loss with myself to account for the manner in which the governor's glance was continually shifting as if involuntarily toward that second door in the rear of the chamber. Something was behind that door, something of which the governor was secretly afraid, or I was much mistaken.

But of a sudden, observing the governor's face, I saw a thing which drove my puzzlement over that circumstance clear out of my mind.

It is well known that Chinese physicians to the mandarin class are great believers in poultices. For their fee's sake the simplest wound is never left to heal itself but is loaded with salves and ointments; consequently their bandages are things of bulk and substance.

But the bandages which masked the governor's yellow face lay flat and even against the skin; and the suspicion which that fact aroused was strongly supported by the freedom with which his jaws and lips moved in talking, certainly suggesting no wound.

Was I then to believe that this too was chicanery, that he was not wounded at all, that the attack on him by Ho Shih Chang was a myth, that——

But why then had he killed Ho Shih Chang? Or—had he?

The justly famed Chinese puzzle is usually a simple thing, and the more perplexing for its simplicity. One plays with it at first, perceives an apparent impossibility, grows interested, and finally loses oneself entirely in trying to solve it; and the longer one persists the more inexplicable it becomes. Then there sometimes comes the slight twist, the little flash of necessary insight.

Such a flash I got then, and in another moment I think I should have been cutting pretty close to the truth of the whole affair; but my attention was diverted by a change in the tone of Hazard's voice.

From apparent friendliness it had passed to a stern and almost challenging note, a change the more significant in that I knew it was deliberately intended. I listened. Hazard was coming to the point of our call at last.

"These are grave things that we have

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talked of, your Excellency, but word has come to us of even a graver thing. It is said that you have bargained with a foreign country for assistance against Koshinga, and that for that assistance you have given a great price, taking from the wealth of the people.

"As we have heard it it would be a calamity, particularly ruinous to the republic and helpful to Koshinga. Koshinga himself could devise nothing more favorable to the Ko Lao Hui. It seemed true talk as we listened, but we have hesitated to believe it, knowing your Excellency's great wisdom."

The governor had started once in the middle of Hazard's second sentence. Thereafter he sat immobile, staring straight at Hazard, his sparse eyebrows twitching nervously. When Hazard had finished he replied slowly and as if his mind was not entirely on his words:

"Doubtless you have heard the honorable truth. Your servant is sorry if the foreign mandarins do not approve of what he has done. Evidence came to me of the necessity of the act. Perhaps my miserable intelligence may be at fault, but——"

He stopped, apparently hesitating, debating something. I saw his eyes again twitch nervously sidewise toward that mysterious door to his right. That last glance seemed in some curious way to resolve his course. He rose slowly.

"There are some documents your servant would like you to see," he said. "Perhaps the sight of them might cause you to consider my course a wise one, which is much to be desired, for it is known that in Peking your opinions are in high repute. They are so very important documents that no one but I——"

He half-turned toward that door, behind which was—what? Obviously he was making an excuse to pass through it—for what purpose? He would leave us alone in the room—again, why?

The slightly chilling thought came to me of the three mysterious deaths that had already occurred in that room—but Hazard was speaking smoothly. And rather amazingly.

"Your Excellency will please not trouble yourself. The documents will wait. Sit down!"

The last two words were a direct command. Hazard's face had turned grim and unyielding as granite. I stared at him, half-terrified at his audacity, and yet with the peculiar feeling that it was my own fault if I did not understand it.

A moment before the explanation had been at the tip of my mental fingers; it was the same queer quirk of facts that explained the whole business—why the governor was and was not honorable and intelligent; why he had and had not power to execute Lomond's document; why his face, though bandaged for wounds, was not wounded; why— But the governor was protesting.

"The honorable foreign mandarins—" he began with not altogether convincing indignation.

"Will remain here," interrupted Hazard with careful and measured rudeness. "And you will remain here. You will have another visitor presently. Sit down, Ho Shih Chang!"

Ah, it was out! I gasped once, and then closed my lips. I was slightly ashamed of not having guessed it for myself, but I would have had it in another minute.

"Ho Shih Chang," repeated Hazard, "thrice murderer and many times traitor, how did you kill the four governors, Ho Shih Chang?"

At Hazard's first accusation the masquerading secretary had uttered a short, hoarse cry as if his throat muscles had been suddenly contracted by terror. That cry was confession; but thereafter he managed to control himself, and now he resumed his seat quite deliberately, staring at us venomously out of half-closed eyes.

But of course, dangerous though he looked, there was nothing he could do. Stripped of his mask, he was like any other criminal; and there was still plenty of authority in the city to deal with him. For instance, Liu Po Wen——

"Why did you kill them?" went on Hazard. "Did you deliberately plan to dispose of the governors as fast as they could be appointed until at last one should come so like you in general appearance that you could pass for him by bandaging your face?

"When he came, did you so disfigure his body after killing him that it would be unrecognizable, so you could exchange clothes and identities with him? Then as governor did you plan to so use your power

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as to alienate the people from the government you were supposed to represent—to dispose of the people's birthright and to invite invasion?

"A clever scheme, Ho Shih Chang—too clever for your poor wits to contrive; the work of a master in crime, Koshinga. But you erred by mingling with it your private affairs, your love-making-by-force.

"Had you no proverb to teach you the unwisdom of that? And so your day is done, as Koshinga's soon will be, because——"

Hazard stopped short. There was the slightest of sounds behind us as if some one had followed through the door by which we had entered. I remembered that the door was hung on well-oiled hinges, that it opened and closed almost noiselessly.

Some one then had entered the room; but that knowledge was not half so terrible as the smile that came over Ho Shih Chang's face. He straightened himself in his chair; and his voice was like the purring of a cat before it springs.

"The Wisdom of the honorable foreign mandarin is great," he said, "but the sure horse stumbles. Moreover you have underestimated the wisdom of your brother *kweitzu* to think that he would be so easily fooled. He is here; will you not greet him?"

By now Hazard and I were on our feet. Obviously we could not both turn our backs on Ho Shih Chang: Hazard touched my hand—a signal. I whirled quickly.

Behind us was Lomond, whom Hazard had invited. It had been a mistake, as I have said, for each of his hands held a revolver, and I looked squarely into the muzzle of one of them while the other was trained on Hazard's spine.

IT WAS disastrous. Moreover, it was absurd and humiliating. Overconfidence had done for us, for we were both armed; and if either of us had held Ho Shih Chang directly under his gun we might at least have checkmated Lomond, have bartered Ho Shih Chang's life for our own.

As it was I admit the short hair rose on my neck as I looked from Lomond's gun into his passionless eyes. Here was a man who was implacable. And I had already seen that he held his accurately aimed guns as steadily as if they were held in the grip of a statue.

"So!" he said coolly. "Which one of you have I to thank for being here?"

Then without waiting for an answer he glanced past us at Ho Shih Chang and changed to the Mandarin dialect.

"You owe your visitors much," he said. "Surely it is unnecessary that they should stand."

Ho Shih Chang with a gloating note in his voice invited us to resume our seats; but neither of us moved. Hazard had not even turned his head, but of course Lomond's words coupled with my own inactivity told him the whole story; and he knew as well as I that Lomond had us covered, that Lomond was in league with Ho Shih Chang, and that in writing Lomond he had in all probability insured our own deaths and made certain Koshinga's triumph in the province of Kiangsi. If I knew my companion chagrin at his mistake was for the moment altogether eclipsing fear.

"You will not be seated, then," Ho Shih Chang went on mockingly. "Well, it is a small matter, for we must soon say a long farewell. It is a pleasure to have met such faithful servants of the republic."

His gown rustled; he was also on his feet.

"It is no pleasure to us," said Hazard quickly, "to have met a traitor."

It is a word that stings in any language; and Hazard's purpose in uttering it was doubtless to provoke controversy and consequent delay—there being, according to his adage, opportunity as long as there is life. He might have succeeded with Ho Shih Chang, for the Chinaman began a sneering reply; but Lomond, who apparently combined Western directness with Eastern craft, interrupted him.

"Children prattle and men act. Ho Shih Chang, we are the servants of Koshinga, to whom the death of these men—whose Sikh's disguise does not deceive me—will be as good news as the taking of the province.

"We know the death we will give them. Let us not delay."

"My brother's advice is good," said Ho Shih Chang, and his gown rustled again.

I could not see what we were to do. Lomond was eying us as a tiger eyes his prey; Hazard, with his back to Lomond, was altogether helpless; and the slightest movement on my part would probably cost me my life and would certainly send a bullet crashing into Hazard's spine.

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It was a moment for finesse; but that required delay, and delay was refused us. However, I suppose it was probably as much a desperate desire to secure it as the natural desire at least to read the whole of the affair correctly before we died for our part in it, that made me put in with an assumption of carelessness:

"All things end, including life; and Koshinga's downfall is written, whether we die early or late. We are grateful to him and his servants for adding interest to life while it lasted. Will you not add to our indebtedness by telling us how the four governors died so that there was no trace of the killing?"

At that there came to Lomond's sallow face the only change of expression that I ever observed on it—a flicker of grim amusement. Behind me I heard Ho Shih Chang chuckle maliciously.

"You will have plenty of time to discover that," said Lomond in English.

Then to Ho Shih Chang:

"Your Excellency, there is no recalling lost moments, and much is to be done before I leave for Foochow. There is a longer road before these two men. Let us all be starting."

The sound of Ho Shih Chang's slow movements had stopped; they were resumed again. He seemed to be moving away from his desk toward that door in the rear of the chamber which had from the beginning of our interview possessed such an unpleasant fascination for him.

A moment of calm thought would, I think, have explained that fascination to me, now that so many other things were understood; but there was no time for it. Lomond was also moving toward that door, edging slowly sidewise in front of me, the knuckles of his trigger-fingers whitening menacingly.

Their immediate purpose was easily understood. They were leaving the chamber; obviously we were to be imprisoned in it and somehow killed. The deadly clutch of Koshinga, whose agents these two men were, was closing in on us at last.

I risked the slightest movement backward and stole a look at Hazard's face. It was not so hopeless as I had imagined it would be.

He too seemed to have that door—or whatever was behind it—on his mind, for he had taken his eyes from Ho Shih Chang, and shot a glance at it. But the next instant he met my look, and I thought his eyes sent me a message. His lips moved noiselessly; but among other convenient things I have learned lip-reading, and what I thought they said was:

"Hope....maybe. Friend....perhaps. Be ready....anyway."

It was not five seconds, the length of time that my eyes had left Lomond. Again I was following his slow movements, freshly confused.

From what feature of this desperate situation Hazard had plucked even the faintest hope I could not understand. But I did know this: his eyes, microscopically accurate, had seen more than mine; his brain, marvelously active, had classified and coordinated that information with a swiftness which I could not match.

One thing only seemed to me a safe guess: if indeed we were to have a chance of escape it would come somehow from behind that mysterious door. But it was also from behind that door that our enemies planned to destroy us.

Hazard's warning to me to be ready had hardly been necessary; my muscles were already tense, my nerves strung up. Hopeful of some added inkling of information, I watched Lomond's face; but it was impassive as a wooden idol's.

He continued to edge slowly sidewise, but had not moved more than his own length when Hazard spoke again, not loudly, but prolonging his vowel sounds in the manner of public speakers who wish their words to carry.

"YOU are clever, Ho Shih Chang, or rather your master is clever. As for you, have you not been oppressed the last half-hour by the knowledge of how you have bungled?

"Power and wealth would this service to Koshinga have brought you; but, as has been seen you jeopardized all by your desire for a woman, which is not the way of one who would win Koshinga's favor. So you betrayed yourself to us—and then in your confusion you made a greater mistake, which has been apparent to me from many signs.

"In the weak hand of this woman you have placed power. What if she should use that power—to win her freedom?"

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Hazard's last two sentences in particular were stressed strongly; clearly they were intended for other ears than Ho Shih Chang's. Clearly, of course, for the ears of the woman herself, the as yet invisible woman whose part in all this affair had been so potent.

I confess my reasoning went no further at that moment, that I understood not at all what hope Hazard could have from her; but I had the excuse of scant time for consideration, for instantly Lomond's eyes glinted angrily and apprehensively past me at Ho Shih Chang.

"How does this false-faced devil know?" he rasped.

And then—

"Where have you put her?"

"The *kweitzu* forced themselves on me," replied Ho Shih Chang hurriedly as if apologizing for an indiscretion. "I was compelled to rid myself of her quickly. I placed her——"

"——!" Lomond reverted to English as—so it seemed to me—he followed a revealing glance of Ho Shih Chang's. And instantly, as if warned of a great danger, he took a swift step sidewise.

As I have said I was fortunately already poised for a leap. It appeared that by now I was the only one in the room who was utterly in the dark as to what was likely to happen; but the visible strength of the enemy's position lay just now behind the black muzzles of Lomond's revolvers. Lomond's agition opened just the faintest chance in the direction, and I was swaying slightly forward on the balls of my feet, when——

There came from somewhere a faint sound, a swift, sliding noise. Or rather there were several of these sounds, like the slipping of wood in smooth, oiled metal grooves.

Simultaneously, and so quickly that Lomond's face had no time to register the terror that must have been his, everything went dark as if a curtain had been flung over the room. Lomond's two targets disappeared in blackness; and his revolvers belched fire just as I launched myself at his knees.

My reaction to the unexpected darkness must have been much swifter than Lomond's, for he had not moved when I reached him. My arms went loosely around his legs and I came up bearing him backward and trying for his wrists.

Two more shots rang out; but just as they were fired I had thrust at his arms with all my force. The next instant I had his wrists, and we were struggling like two wild beasts.

I was however able to keep his hands over his head and his revolvers useless; and presently I back-heeled him and flung him to the floor.

Behind me I heard another fall, and I knew that Hazard and Ho Shih Chang had also gone down. I had no fear as to the result of that struggle.

Without any compunction I struck Lomond's head back against the floor and he went limp just as Hazard called over to me—

"Have you got him, Partridge?"

"Yes. Knocked out."

"Well then, bind him."

I heard Ho Shih Chang breathing in the manner of one upon whose chest there is a heavy pressure—doubtless the weight of Hazard's knee.

Tearing strips from the front of Lomond's coat, I began trussing him hand and foot. The tables were completely turned; our two opponents were entirely in our power—a transition so sudden and startling that for a minute I could realize nothing else.

But when my work with Lomond was half over a fresh terror came to me—a terror of the inexplicable. The darkness of the room was no more complete than the darkness of my mind concerning what strange means had been used to give us the mastery and by whom it had been given us.

One thing was almost certain—this I reasoned swiftly—Death still lurked very close to us, for what had happened could hardly be other than what Lomond and Ho Shih Chang had planned to happen, except that they also had been caught in their trap for us. They had planned to imprison us in that room, and there we were imprisoned; and the memory that four men had already met unexplained deaths there struck my mind a chilling blow. I tied my last knot in Lomond's bonds and got to my feet.

"Well, Hazard—" I tried to keep my voice steady—"what is it?"

"What indeed?" echoed Hazard tonelessly. "Do you hear that sound?"

I had not noticed it; but now I heard a loud continuous hissing from somewhere

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overhead—a sinister sound, suggesting the hissing of a great serpent, which impinged upon what was otherwise an utter silence. Which silence, I now remembered, had been complete all along save for the sound of our voices, so remotely situated was this room of mysterious happenings.

"It's gas," said Hazard. "Asphyxiating gas."

"It's death," chuckled Ho Shih Chang raucously, and yet I thought without quite complete conviction. "The honorable foreign mandarins have not saved themselves. They will die as——"

He choked on the gag that Hazard thrust into his mouth. Rapidly tying it, Hazard continued rapidly but with his calm unshaken:

"Yes, it's death; or at any rate it's meant death for others. The place is a gas chamber with walls pretty nearly soundproof, and air-tight—and I don't suppose you noticed as we entered how the edge of inch-think planking lay flush with the surface of the stone embrasure just inside the door. Nor did the governors who died apparently notice it, though they had more opportunity; but Chinese officials aren't an observing tribe.

"But after we'd learned that it was in this room that the governors had been killed it was easily presumed that it was the edge of a sliding inner door which had been used to imprison them, and that the windows could be closed in the same way. Yes, we're trapped—but as for dying here, we'll see."

"But who," I cried rather foolishly, for by now I should certainly have understood it, "who trapped us? Who——"

"Liu Po Wen's daughter, of course. For—don't you see?—it must have been she. I had that all figured out—it was our only chance. Of course, I hoped to find her with Ho Shih Chang—that was the reason for my hurry in getting here—and his manner convinced me that we had surprized him with her.

"Where had he placed her? That was obvious—behind that other door.

"That was why I tried to give her a hint in that last speech of mine to Ho Shih Chang—and succeeded. But where is that other door?"

I had felt my way over to Hazard, and together we started to grope for it. Our struggles with Lomond and Ho Shih Chang had lost us all sense of direction, and the darkness was absolute, so we made our way to the wall and began to feel around it in opposite directions. Already the air was sickeningly thick with gas; but I continued to question nervously—

"But how did you know that she could do this, could work Ho Shih Chang's trap against him?"

"Know! Lord, Partridge, I didn't know. But Ho Shih Chang was afraid—that meant something. And a villain's usually a boaster; wouldn't it have been like him to boast to her of what he had done and how he had done it, and the reward he expected to get from Koshinga?

"And the place she was hidden was the natural place for the lever or button, or whatever it is that controls this infernal contrivance, to be, for the room behind that door must be at the extreme end of the *yamen*, where the assassin could work and wait unobserved. Besides, I repeat, it was our only chance; and you know my creed that there's always a chance somewhere."

"But," I continued, working swiftly around the wall, "even now, if it is she, and if we are able to communicate with her and convince her that we're friends——"

"Three things are possible," Hazard took the question out of my mouth. "There's the door, which she may be able to open; there's this whole devilish mechanism of death, which she may be able to reverse; and there's a bare chance that if these things fail she may be able to escape and carry the tale to her father in time for him to save us.

"It's lucky that we know him to be all that's good in Chinese officials, for with the governor's office temporarily eliminated he'll be the main power in Nanchang, and we'll have to depend upon him——"

That was like Hazard, to be already looking forward to the completion of our work against Koshinga. Indeed, I thought our triumph might be very great if only—But just then I found, not the door for which we were looking but an unbroken wooden surface which must be the thick plank panel that Hazard had said would be found over the one other exit. Straight across the room then must lie that other door; and I turned quickly, judging my course. But just then came Hazard's voice:

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"Here! I've found it, Partridge."

And I was at his side in a moment. He was already pounding on the door heavily and intermittently, listening between times for that response upon which so much depended—certainly our lives and very possibly that which was vastly more important, the imminent mass movement of Asia, for good or ill.

For if we did not escape, if Koshinga's conspiracy were not fully exposed, he might easily find other instruments, he might easily carry his plot to its completion.

AND then the response came, the thin and almost inaudible but well-poised voice of the educated Chinese woman, of that woman whose part in this affair had been as an invisible thread running from beginning to end, but which had nevertheless been perceived and traced by Hazard step by step to this culmination—the voice of the daughter of Liu Po Wen, chief magistrate of Nanchang.

"I have heard the talk of the foreign gentlemen. There is no escape from this room, for the windows are barred; but if the *Megwas* will have the patience to wait I will try——"

The air in the room was becoming deadly. The interchange of a few swift sentences informed us that though Ho Shih Chang had by his boasting made known to the woman the manner of his process of murder—the working of a lever cleverly concealed behind the drawer of a desk—she had yet to learn how the system of weights which controlled both the gas outlet and the sliding panels of plank could be reversed.

Moreover the door between her and us was also fast shut and could only be opened by that same unknown means. Since death was their end in any case there was obviously no way for Hazard and me to force the secret from the sealed lips of Lomond or Ho Shih Chang.

And so at the end of what might have been fifteen minutes of increasing asphyxiation Hazard and I began to feel that our faces were at last turned toward the final adventure of man.

In a little while more I, for one, was floating softly down into billowy depths of blackness; nor was I fully conscious of the exact moment when, the woman having found that second hidden lever, the revivifying air and the light of day flooded into the room again.

TO DESCRIBE our departure from the *yamen*, our visit to Liu Po Wen, and his amazement at sight of the agreement possessed by Lomond and the further documents which we discovered in the effects of Ho Shih Chang—documents which involved in the Ko Lao Hui conspiracy some of the names most prominent in Kiangsi politics—would be but a recital of the commonplace and the instant wholesale arrests that followed under the direction of Liu Po Wen are merely matters of last year's history. History also records in a negative fashion the complete subsidence of the Kiangsi ferment, from which an empire-wide harvest of death might so easily have sprung.

But concerning the inner details of the affair history is as usual silent; and the first account has been here given of Hazard's and my part in checking what Koshinga intended to be his final blow against the stability of New China. It was a postponement we had gained, not a decision; but until Koshinga's pretensions were exposed and his gullible followers undeceived a decision was hardly to be courted.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

THIS time, with no apologies whatever, I pass on to you a letter telling what one comrade did to get a copy of our magazine. I leave it to you whether I ought to have suppressed it merely because praise of the magazine is usually kept out of Camp-Fire. Me, I couldn't resist. If no one else will join me, I'll give Chew Tobacco a rising vote of thanks all by myself.

Mr. Webb, at the time of writing, was general agent of The Liberty Amusement Co., Ltd.

En Route.

There has never been, nor ever will be, a magazine that will take a-hold of the real American adventurer like *Adventure*. That is made up with stories by real old live he-men to be read and appreciated by the peregrinate he-men of the world. On our little show we have many admirers of *Adventure*—real he-men, too. Among these are two fancy ropers and experienced cowmen, who have herded on our own Western frontiers and punched in the South and Central American cow-countries.

ONE of these fellows looks forward to the arrival of *Adventure* stronger than myself, and that is going some. Only a few days since we were playing a stand in which we were water-bound; no trains were running, nor any likelihood of one running in another week. *Adventure* was due on the newsstands. The nearest newsstand was thirty-two miles away, which would have been easy to reach by mail, through the train news-agent or telephone, had we adequate train service. What does this monkey do? He stands the strain for two days, and, lo, one morning I notice him saddling his best mount.

"Where to, Chew Tobacco?" I asked.

"Aw, I want something to read, and these —— birds in this strip of country only know a newspaper and their Bible."

"But, Chew Tobacco, the nearest newsstand of any importance is thirty-two miles south, and the whole country is under water for miles. Anyway, what will you find when you get there?"

"*Adventure*, by ——!" was the prompt rejoinder. "It was due out two days 'fore this —— flood came, and I'm going to have her or bust a lung swimming after it." And, with that he swung into his saddle and was gone.

LATE that night, or rather early the following morning, I heard an awful commotion outside my stateroom door on board the sleepers.

"Who's there?" I called.

"Chew Tobacco Wallace, you rummy-head! Who'd you reckon was here; and furthermore, he's got your *Adventure*. So just unroll your carcass from the downy-down, old hoss, and make a dive for the poke, taking therefrom the full amount of twenty cents. I'm pretty well tuckered out and the pinto is worse; but I knew you'd be just plum' anxious to see her. That's why I make all this fuss, you old feather-bed wallower."

Well, he was about right. I was "just plum' anxious" to see the magazine. I always am. But think it over. This fellow—a man of the great outdoors, and one who has been a tramp in many climes—rode over a dangerous route to the tune of sixty-four miles to get our favorite magazine. He rode, and he and his horse were compelled to swim in many places in the thirty-two there and thirty-two miles back. That shows the old "take a-hold" stuff—eh, what?—THOMAS WEBB.

AN ARGUMENT. Go it easy, comrades. Camp-Fire is sure the place for difference of opinions, but—well, words have a trick of appearing a bit harder on paper than they're meant. We're all friends together and we'll all have to watch so that our words will sound as friendly from the printed page as if we could all talk together personally. Now and then Uncle Frank Huston lets go with a wallop but we all have known and liked him for a long time, he's old enough to be a daddy to most of us and, well, he's Uncle Frank and that's enough.

Unfortunately, for lack of space, we had to omit the drawings this time, though they were entirely good and clear enough for reproduction.

Arapahoe, Wyoming.

Have read Irving Blank's letter regarding the so called "Hurry Up Buckle." I hardly like to dispute the word of a man that has spent about seven years on the range, but right here is where I will have to go on record as saying that one Irving Blank has his wires twisted. In the first place no self-respecting cow waddie is caring to risk his neck any more than is necessary, and he would sure be doing it were he to use a takleberry buckle.

Then on the other hand, according to friend Blank's letter he must saddle and mount his horse from the Injun side, and saddle him in a way that would make a "common hand" ashamed of himself.

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While I am not much of an artist I have tried to make the diagrams plain enough to show what I am driving at. As any one can see, a man can hardly work a "hurry up buckle" on the "short latigo ring," to quote friend Blank. At least he can't if he is plum' cold sober' and is a cow hand as he claims to be.—GEORGE ORMOND.

ON THE OCCASION of his first story in our magazine Lee Hooper, following Camp-Fire custom, stands up and introduces himself:

Beaufort, N. C.

A sketch of my life would be, in my opinion, sadly out of place in the company of adventurous histories such as I have so frequently read in "Camp Fire," but if such a sketch can bring me closer, even in spirit, to those interesting men who write for you, it will be a pleasure to give it to you.

BORN in Alabama, I spent my earlier years in that State until I went to Virginia to college. I was one of a brave troop that made the welkin howl on the night when the United States declared war on Spain, but after a firm word from a very matter-of-fact professor I recall our evaporating patriotism even to this date. My other adventures there consisted in sundry death-grapples with mathematics. I took the count when I tackled history, Greek, Latin, and such studies, so I came to the belated conclusion that I was cut out for a civil engineer. I still labor under that delusion.

My travels have taken me as far north as Canada, and in the other direction to the tropics, where I spent about eight years, most of the time on the Panama Canal. I have moved around considerably in southern seas, but have never met a pirate or found a buried treasure or had any other kind of adventure out of the ordinary run of incidents. I might have had a fight with a boa-constrictor once in Costa Rica but for the fact that he saw me first; I nearly killed a tiger once on a tiger hunt in Colombia. I saw him first.

My occupation is building highways, and I have done that for the better part of my mature years, or more exactly, for twenty years, and I get my adventures usually at second-hand.—LEE HOOPER.

SOME more about the Gila monster, from one of our comrades who had some rough luck in Mexico:

El Paso, Texas.

I just happened to see Mr. Alex McLaren's letter in Camp-Fire (regarding Gila Monsters), and will say this much. I think the man he speaks of as living in Los Angeles and having a house full of reptiles is full of hop as regards to Gila Monster not being poisonous when fed on eggs and other clean food. For I have held a few Gila Monsters in captivity myself and I tried the rabbit experiment too, and I'll tell the wide, wide world that if a Gila had been fed on honey and ambrosia I would not let him bite me for a speckled pup. Because the Gila I experimented with had had nothing but eggs for over three months and when he bit that said rabbit poor bunny cashed in in about five or ten minutes more or less. Mr. McLaren also says that the breath is said to have a sickening effect but from personal experience can not say. I can say that there is only one thing that is any more sickening than a Gila's breath and that is two of 'em.

As for handling a Gila, it is simple. Just grab him by the neck as you would a snake and he is your meat. Only be darned careful about that said breath, for it smells just like a Gila looks, and when that is said it's all said.

He also speaks of Cave Creek, Arizona. I wonder if he means the Cave Creek between Rodes, New Mexico, and Paradise, Arizona?

I LOST all I had in Cananea, Sonora, Mexico, in 1916. The folks were living there then a while. I was driving a truck for Tio Samuel with Mistah Pershing in pursuit of the elusive Mr. Villa, and while I was engaged in this pleasing pastime the cholos went "Hermantile" at Cananea and undertook the cleaning out of all the Gringoes.

Well, to make a long story short, the folks had to *laigasen* (beat it) between suns and all my books, clothes and everything I cared a darn for including a .45 Colt, Bisley model Six, went to help La Patria. —ALBERT LEFITZGERALD.

AS TO the bears in "Wulfhere" Mr. Higginson gives us the following:

Port Dalhousie, Ontario, Canada.

Frank Finn, F. Z. S. author of "The Wild Beasts of the World," a work that may be found in most public libraries, tells many interesting things about bears, their intelligence, etc. The polar bear, the largest of the tribe, uses great ingenuity in attacking seals, even to covering his black nose with his white paw to escape detection as he approaches his prey. In the Zoo he will skilfully peel an orange with his claws, or make a current in the water with his paw to draw a floating object towards him, or open a coconut by flinging it against the bars of his den. "Old Sam," a polar bear that died in the London Zoo in 1903, would put a piece of his rations just outside the bars of his den, then hide just behind the stone wall where he would be invisible to persons coming by. These persons thinking to do the bear a good turn would push the piece of food inside the den with their canes or umbrellas, when a great paw would suddenly dart out and these articles would be snatched from their grasp and made unfit for future use. This was a common trick of Old Sam, and one which he seemed to enjoy thoroughly.

THE polar bears prowl oftentimes in companies. The female bear alone hibernates. They eat fish, seals and whale meat, and more than one case of man-eating has been reported against them by arctic explorers.

Even as early as Viking times bear-baiting was a favorite amusement, and both white and brown bears were used. One old-time author tells of a certain church falling down one Sunday while the people were at the bear-baiting, remarking, quaintly, "Now if those people had been at Church when they should have been at the Bear-baiting they would have been killed."

Male polar bears have been mated with brown bears and hybrids produced. These have been in turn mated with both polar and brown bears and with other hybrids and cubs have been born. There are specimens of such hybrids in the London Zoo and in a German Zoo, all of them fertile.

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THE bear though clumsy in appearance will in a fair race outrun any man. They are exceedingly quick too with their paws and jaws. They will kill and eat cattle and even horses, and young pigs are esteemed by them a great delicacy. Most of us have seen bears do many extraordinary tricks, such as standing on their heads, catching skilfully a pole thrown into the air, tossing and catching a ball, standing on a large ball and rolling it across the platform, drinking out of a bottle, dancing, etc, all at the command of the trainer.—A. B. HIGGINSON.

ANOTHER my-first-copy-of-*Adventure* story, the promise of the story of one of our "Id." tags and a letter that is characteristic of the dyed-in-the-wool adventurer:

New York.

That metal tag which I received from you in 1917 or '18 while at Chicago has been with me through some hard corners and sometime I am going to write you a full account of them. I read my first story in *Adventure* in France, 1915, while trying to forget the mudholes and Flanders. I was wounded at the battle of Vimy Ridge, in April, 1917, and shortly after discharged. If I belonged to the great majority of sensible humans I would settle down and stay in one place for a while, but as it is I am constantly on the go.—JOHN PAUL JONES.

P. S. I am heading for Central America the first of December. Can you get my card to me before that? Thanks.

A WORD from E. E. Harriman concerning his story in this issue:

Los Angeles.

Missionary Bill is a conglomerate, made up from an intimate and varied acquaintance with numbers of naval seamen. I have met him in various guises and in many places. In lake ports in several coast cities, ashore in Los Angeles, on the decks of destroyers, cruisers and battleships. I saw three of him go overboard after an old lady who fell between a lighter and the *Colorado* and there was less than the time of a swift wink between the three splashes.

I HAVE seen a number of him walking city streets, on shore leave with his matey, hearty, good-tempered, kindly, generous, but a fighting terror when some fool trod on his sensibilities. I have talked with him hundreds of times in all sorts of places and I have long wished to let others see *Bill* from both sides, with some slight emphasis laid on the kindly generosity which is strong in his nature.

Limey, his undersized matey, is drawn from life. He talks just the same on a destroyer deck as he does in the story. He looks just as diminutive when he walks, swaggeringly, beside my two hundred pound, six foot three son, as he does beside Bill. And his favorite name for that son is always "You bloomin' big 'ippo!"

He bets his "bloody spukes" on a crap game or scraps an insulting landsman with just the same terrier-like intensity.

THE salient point in *Bill's* makeup is his generously kind spirit and that he has shown to me in a hundred ways. Impudent, bullying little Limey backs him up and abets him, just as far as his duty to "the missus" will let him. I wrote the story because I like a "gob" so darned well that I want every one else to like him, too.

We had 1,300 of him ashore here in one day and only four arrests for disorderly conduct. "—— it!" said one. "We're your guests!"

This short and emphatic sentence, I maintain, gave a reason in full for the good behavior of the 1,300 men.

The battle scene on Main Street is fiction, but its cause is not. We had an Austrian here at the opening of the great war who tried the same tactics shown by the ex-bosun. There was no great fight. An ambulance carried him off for repairs, that was all.

The ride in the patrol wagon is historic. I know the hero of that very well indeed. Only George threw off two officers and the drivers without any help and drove back to the central station alone.

I reckon that is about all there is to say, except that I hope you Camp-Fire boys will like *Bill*.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

A COMRADE in Burma writes in about one of Edgar Young's South American stories and Mr. Young gives interesting information concerning wart fever:

Yenangyaung, Upper Burma.

When the story "The Son of a Fool" came out I went to one of the boys who know Peru like the palm of his hand and asked him about the wart fever. Well, he told me all about the time that the epidemic hit that bunch up on the railroad bridge and he also claims that there is a cure for it, which can be procured from the Amazon River Indians over east of the Andes. But he said he had never heard of the wart fever having been in Lima or Callao.—HILAND MCREATH SMITH.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have read with interest the quotation from the letter of Mr. Hiland McReath Smith, Upper Burma.

The following is about all that is officially known about Wart Fever, unless something has been definitely learned during the past two years:

UNDER *Warts* in Encyclopedia Britannica occurs this statement: "A peculiar form of wart known as *verrugas* occurs endemically in the Andes. It is believed to have been one of the causes of the excessive mortality from hemorrhages of the skin among the troops of Pizarro. Attention was called to it in 1842 by Dr. Archibald Smith."

In the Standard Dictionary under *Verrugas* (Lat. *Verruca*, wart) they give the definition in these words: "An endemic disease peculiar to Peru, characterized by ulcerous vascular tumors on the surface and mucuous membranes that become confluent and exhaust the patient by prolonged suppuration and frequent hemorraghes: due to a special bacillus."

The International Dictionary puts it in this form: "*Verrugas*—(Sp. *Verrugas*, warts). An endemic disease occuring in the Andes in Peru characterized by warty tumors which ulcerate and bleed. It is attended with febrile symptoms and is

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probably due to a special bacillus and is often fatal. Called also Oroya Fever, Peruvian Warts, etc." Attention is also called to framboesia, a tropical disease of the West Indies and Africa.

NOW as to what knowledge I have of it from first hand: Back in 1911 or '12 I came up the coast and over to Lima with just about enough money to buy a package of cigarets. I hit the Cerro de Pasco general office in the Sun Life Building on Calle Union for a pass to Cerro de Pasco in order to look up a job of work. They gave me a ticket to Oroya and a pass from there up to the mines. The road up to Oroya is not their line but belongs to the Central of Peru. The conductor on the Peru Central was a white haired old granddaddy of an American who had helped build the road. When he learned I was also a railroad man he came and sat in the seat with me and talked to me all the time he was not engaged in collecting tickets. He pointed out the Veraguas Bridge, which, due to the scourge of wart fever that annihilated the American and native forces during construction, has come to be locally known as Verrugas Bridge, or Puente de Verrugas, "Wart Fever Bridge." It is at Kilometer 84 and is 575 feet high. If the kilometers are numbered from Callao, which I think they are, this would make it about 70 kilometers from Lima, or about 45 miles. On this same line the altitude 90 miles from Lima is about 3,000 feet. From there on it shoots right up the mountains. However, according to these figures the Wart Fever Bridge is something between sea level and 3,000 feet.

HE TOLD me that several thousand were killed by the fever during the construction of the bridge and that it was abandoned several times on this account. He said it was so virulent that if a man even walked over the bridge and got above the water of the river he was smitten. According to his report three American doctors came down to study the cause and put up tents near the bridge and all died within a short time. He said he had tasted the water of the river and that it was acrid and bitter and could not even be used for making tea. He said he had confined his drinking to *pisco* and *chica*, native whisky and wine, when near the neighborhood of the bridge with his work-train.

I took most all he said with a small grain of salt but was able to corroborate his story after I arrived in Cerro de Pasco. I believe it was 1,800 men who died at the bridge and how many laborers died in the other camps is unknown. His statement that "thousands died" can be accepted literally. He also told me about Meiggs and his work of locating and building a railroad which is regarded as one of the most wonderful in the world, about the runaway (which I verified) which run down the mountain, killed eleven men on a bridge, and then jumped into the cañon below, and many of the incidents I narrated in "The Streak of Lean."

I WORKED for a time in Cerro and when I came out I heard they had another scourge of verrugas down on the lower end of the Peru Central R. R. We took on passengers down to a station after we began hitting the lowlands at the base of the mountains which is something like 5,000 feet. I believe they took on passengers at a couple of stations below there. The last passenger they let on was an Italian lady accompanied by a young Indian girl servant who carried a hen in her arms. Then they locked the doors and "highballed" through to Lima, neither taking on nor letting off passengers. I looked out the window to get an eye-full and saw signs of much distress in many of the small towns as we came through, doing about 20 miles an hour, or less, for we had to kill time to keep on the schedule, which allowed for numerous stops.

The country was a flat, desert valley, with a small town here and there along the railroad. I noticed that each little village had one or two Chinese stores and that the local officials had put out yellow flags on many houses. In one or two I saw them hauling away dead in carts. I am pretty sure that I saw signs of the plague in the last village before we struck Lima and on the outskirts of Lima I saw armed men maintaining the quarantine. Further, from personal observation and questioning—for I was interested from personal motives as I did not want the plague—I learned that there were a few cases in Lima and that one American, a tobacco merchant, had died in Callao with it, and that another man, a German, had died on a boat en route to Panama. I made numerous inquiries as to the effect of the disease from two American doctors and from a missionary from Baltimore, Md., a Mr. Pohl, of the Seven Day Adventist Faith. All seemed to say that there was a chance of recovery so long as none of the warts bursted inwardly and assured me that the mortality was high enough to be startling. I used this with other true incidents from other places and all the story can be upheld by taking parts from three or four countries, including plague-ridden Guayaquil.

I HAVE asked frequent questions about wart fever and I have told several scientific men about it. Dr. Samuel of Louisville, Ky., was greatly interested and wanted to go down and study it at first-hand. I also told the surgeons in the Panama Canal Hospitals as much as I knew, and I believe I have spoken to you about it. So far as I know the bacillus *has not yet been segregated*, in spite of the statement in the dictionary to that effect; neither has the carrier been found. Numerous surmises have been made. Gnats have been suspected, flies, even toads, but, at last accounts I had, nothing definite had been learned. Not only does this fever prove to be endemic to Peru, but endemic to this particular valley of Peru and this particular river, and I might almost say endemic to the lower portion of the river, although the water of the upper river is shunned by the Indians who call it "Verruga Water" and say it gives wart fever. All accounts agree that it is bitter and unfit to drink. It may be that the secret of this fever and its transmission will yet be found to be some abrasive or astringent chemical which evaporates from the river as it passes through the desert country of the lowlands at the base of the Andes. We can only surmise, and I, for one, would like to know just what causes this peculiar and deadly disease.

NOW I have never heard of this fever on the upper Amazon and will go on record as saying that it does not exist on the eastern slopes endemically, from questions I have asked and all books I have read of men who have explored this country (and

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I have missed few in the past five years). Cancer-giving flies exist on the eastern slopes. I saw a Mr. Ross at Cerro de Pasco who was bitten between the eyes while on a trip down the eastern slopes and whose face was almost entirely eaten away when I talked with him in the club house at Cerro. A collection was being taken up at the time to send men with Mr. Ross back to some tribe of Indians who were supposed to possess a poultice of herbs that would cure him. I have learned since that he had waited too long and that they were unable to help him when he finally went, and I believe Dr. Ivans, a Cerro de Pasco camp doctor who lived at Sayville, L. I., told me he died soon after I left Cerro.

THE fact that no wart fever is to be found on the Upper Amazon would probably "knock Mr. Hiland McReath Smith's 'cure' for it for a goal" if allowed to remain as I have stated it. However, as he has been light on me, I will assist him. According to the report of two Americans who made the trip from the Cauca Valley of Colombia across the Andes and down the Putumayo River to Iquitos (The Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise," T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), they encountered a settlement of Incas on the upper headwaters of the rivers. There are doubtless many such settlements. Our old Camp-Fire comrade Walter R. Johnson spoke of seeing similar people and a man who wrote the Camp-Fire in answer to his letter also mentioned them. Lange spoke of seeing Indians with typical Jewish features among the Mangeromas.

The Incas, according to my notion, were descendants of the ancient Persians. The type has disappeared from the civilized portion of Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. I looked in vain for an "Inca type" and found him not. It is possible that the Spaniards worked few of these highly intelligent men to death, with thousands upon top of thousands of miles of unexplored territory across the mountains. Walter Johnson firmly believes they have a capital with all the splendor of ancient Cuzco back in the unexplored forests of Ecuador, Peru, or Brazil, and I believe he is right now searching for it. The Incas had their "holy city," a custom probably brought from Persia. A man coming from Cuzco was given deference by a man going to it. Possibly at one of the small outposts of their new country they heard of the ravages of the plague in what had been their former homes. Having had it to deal with for hundreds of years they possibly knew a cure, for they farmed this valley of Peru. I saw the terraces they made in this same valley and the remains of their houses of stone. It is quite likely they were as far advanced in medicine as they were in science and mathematics and politics (they had done away with poverty and crime).

THEY possibly knew how to cure and prevent verrugas as they knew how to temper that copper head I saw in the glass case at Cerro de Pasco and as "healing the sick" is a part of their religion they possibly sent word that they knew the cure when they heard of the scourge. Or, to be less visionary, the cure possibly got handed down through the Quichuas, the subjects of the Incas, Kings of Peru. Those old Indian cures are usually good. They were using Hot Springs, Arkansas, in this country for the curative effects of hot water and our Indians were dopes when compared with such highly civilized and cultured people as the Incas. There's the loop-hole for Mr. Smith. Tell him to inform his friend that there have been other scourges of the verrugas and a couple since I was there. The Peruvian Government, and the Pan-American Union may not say that verrugas was ever in Lima and Callao. But I know what I saw. I guess his friend was down there before my time ——fire, haven't I made this a long one! —EDGAR YOUNG.

ONCE Harold Lamb, of our writers' brigade, made a statement in a letter that caused me to ask just what he meant. In his reply he put the whole thing concisely in a nut-shell. Without making comparisons between our magazine and others, I think that what he says is true. It does give a living, intimate panorama of our country's development, thanks to the fact that our writers as a class know the material and atmosphere they use in their stories.

Here is the bit from Mr. Lamb's letter:

New York.

I think my claim that *Adventure* unfolds the story of national development is *bona fide*. Page for page, no other magazine that I know of draws the picture that *Adventure* draws of American growth all along the line from the pioneer to the lumber boss.—HAROLD LAMB.

SOMETHING about homesteading and free range conditions in connection with his story in this issue from William M. McCoy:

Los Angeles.

I've known and observed my share of homesteaders, white, black and all shades in between, and I have never seen one make a success who did not have his vision of a home, a sort of mirage to which he could turn his eyes. He might not have called it that, but he had it, and he had to fight every day to make it come true just as the wop does in this yarn. Homesteading is a real adventure these days, and it is a game which assays a much higher percentage of broken hearts than it does dreams come true. One reason, of course, is that the man with money enough to buy a farm does not homestead. It is the chap with little money and consequently little equipment who endures privation, isolation, and all sorts of things a pioneer must face, in order to win a home on the land.

I RECENTLY returned from a swing of a thousand-odd miles through the desert, both tamed and untamed. In one very interesting valley not far from California, Arizona and Nevada I spent a couple of weeks. This is all free range country, and there are three outfits in the vicinity. One of them is a very large affair, which we'll call the Bar-B's, which is not its name. Their riders are all

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Indians or breeds, and fights over water are common. This outfit have perhays a dozen section foremen each one with his riders occupying a section headquarters. The other two outfits are smaller, but all white. The valley has an elevation of more than four thousand feet, there is good grazing, the land is good, and about a score of settlers, perhaps more, have taken up homesteads there.

The Bar-B's have tried to drive every one of them out, but the other two outfits side with the settlers. The day I landed a cattle-water war broke out between the Bar-B crew and the other cattlemen. The next day a woman settler went away from her home for a while, and when she came back every vestige of her house had disappeared. Before dark the nearest section headquarters of the Bar-B outfit mysteriously burned to the ground, and while the general foreman was investigating this, his own house burned down.

At daylight on the third morning of my stay armed cowboys took possession of the water-holes in "our" end of the valley, and began cutting out Bar-B cattle, gathering them into bunches of scores or hundreds and stampeding them north. There was a grand mêlée of riding, roping, and bowling, and plenty of excitement for a time. Every one, even small boys and women, were packing guns. The water-holes were guarded night and day. The Indian riders came down in force, but their bluff didn't work. I was at the water-hole when they showed up, and when the old white riders—all the young ones were away in the Army—rode out to meet them I would have bet anything in the world to one that there was going to be real trouble. But the Indians and breeds lost their nerve, and those old bow-legged, gray-haired lizards turned them around and sent them back with instructions to stay there. So you see there is still something doing once in a while in the free range country.—WILLIAM M. McCOY.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

AS STATED before, in considering the ridiculously low pay of teachers, we are, nearly all along the line, paying the brain-worker far less than the hand-worker and thereby bringing heavy pressure upon every one to turn to hand-labor rather than brain-labor. That is, we are urging civilization to stop advancing and turn back toward jungle conditions, for civilization is merely the progress of man's substituting of brain-work for hand-work to the greatest extent possible, from wagon-wheel and raft to electric motor.

But this by no means identifies brain-work with what we call Capital, and herein Labor (hand-labor), in its advancing of only its own selfish interests and in its estimate of the general situation, has been making a mistake. Brain-work is more closely allied with hand-work, but in practise it has become an unorganized and unrecognized class by itself, largely ignored by Labor and largely preyed upon by Capital, though Capital recognizes and rewards it in at least some of its phases.

CAPITAL represents only one kind of brain-work. It has only the kind of brains that can make dollars, but dollars are only measures of values, not values in themselves. The only real values are things *produced* by brain-work and hand-work. If it were not for them there would be no dollars and no need of dollars. Whereas there *can* be production without dollars.

But of course a Capitalist often has both kinds of brains, the kind that sees how to produce and the kind that merely collects from producing. We do not attach enough importance to the distinction and Labor mistakenly rails at the Capitalist in both of these capacities, forgetting that in at least one of them the Capitalist is a genuine producer like themselves, merely using a different kind of tool.

YET it is true that Capitalists in general too often make the dollars, not the production itself, their chief aim—production only a means to an end and to be handled and controlled less with a view to getting as much production as possible than to getting as many dollars as possible.

The result is that, for the sake of fixing prices and markets, stocks and bonds, so as to bring to this kind of Capitalist the greatest number of dollars possible, actual production of things themselves is too often not only put under artificial regulations but limited and held down below its natural possibilities. By lessening production or holding back products, resultant high prices often bring in more dollars

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than would come from full production at lower prices. "Cornering the market" is, in the last analysis, merely a lessening of production.

That is very nice for this type of Capitalist, at least for the time being, but very hard on the country as a whole, and, being a part of the country himself, that Capitalist himself will inevitably suffer in the long run. His game is to get what he can before he has to suffer from the results of his methods.

THIS artificial control of production needs only one kind of brains—money-brains. Producing-brains have nothing to do with it. Indeed, they are allowed to produce only to the extent that money-brains see fit. And hand-work, of course, is in the same boat with producing-brains. Yet a money-brain, even though it may not have enough producing-brains or hands sufficiently strong, skilled and intelligent to produce anything whatsoever, can cut down production whenever it sees dollar-profit to itself in so doing.

Therefore we've drifted into considering money-brains the highest type of brains. It isn't. It comes closer to being the lowest type. Certainly it is economically the least valuable and most harmful. It does not at first glance seem so, but it is.

Its defence is that it "renders all these great enterprises and all our splendid progress possible." It doesn't. That is, it is only a secondary and minor factor. For the most part it merely preys upon them.

A given Capitalist may have both money-brains and producing-brains, but it is his *producing*-brains and the *producing*-brains he hires that "renders all these, etc." And if he uses his producing-brains merely for the sake of what his money-brains can make out of it, lessening production whenever he can get more dollars by doing so, he is wrecking industry, not building it.

A people's economic salvation lies in producing as much possible as efficiently as possible.

CAPITAL and intelligent handling of Capital are essential to production, but so are producing-brains and hand-work. Money-brains working *for the greatest and most efficient production* are essential. Money-brains *working for as many dollars as possible at the expense of production* are not only unnecessary but harmful.

To let money-brains control and limit production is economic suicide. And we are committing economic suicide.

THE remedy? No adequate remedy for any economic evil can be reduced to a brief and simple statement, but stated broadly and in fundamentals, the obvious remedy is to put producing plants on the basis of producing as much as they can and as efficiently as they can. This is impossible so long as they are controlled by money-brains alone for the purposes of money-brains alone. And it is impossible so long as Labor and most of the rest of us persist in blaming producing-brain Capital for the sins of money-brain Capital, not even seeing the vast difference between the two.

The two other producing factors are producing-brains and hand-work. The essential and real interest of these two factors lies in producing as much and as efficiently as possible. (In a given plant they might gain more from it by a greater dollar income from lessened production *if* the surplus profit were equitably shared with them, but with other plants working on the same basis their extra dollar-profit would be eaten up through a thousand channels in furnishing surplus dollar-profit to all the other plants.) To prevent control of actual production by money-brains alone, production must be controlled by producing-brains and hand-work as well as by money-brains. Capital, being necessary, must be protected and represented, but production must be even more safeguarded.

THAT is more easily said than done. It is also more quickly said than done. Like any other economic or sociological remedy. When the Bolshevist or any other reformer comes briskly on the scene and briskly presents a brisk plan for making everything lovely, thinking people naturally hold back. The reformer would not be so brisk with his magic remedy if he really understood the intricacy and delicacy of the economic structure. Nor would he be in such a hurry if he realized the havoc inevitable from any great sudden change in that structure. Nevertheless there can be no progress or betterment unless we map out the course ahead *and forward*. We may realize that destruction and revolution are likely to be the slowest method in the long run, but we are giving no chance to evolution and constructive development unless we continually analyze our present structure and keep our minds wide open to every sane plan for improvement. Even the Bolshevist and I. W. W., however little we may like them or him, is doing us some service in making us *think*.

This matter of taking control of production out of the hands of money-brains alone is no more to be considered a magic remedy for sudden and sweeping application than is any other remedy. But as surely as we are alive it is something demanding our very earnest thought.

AND a first step in its consideration is some very careful thought on the relative importance and place of producing-brains in the comparsion with both money-brains and hand-work. Our ears ache with the clamor about the relative merits of Capital and Labor—"Labor" being almost wholly identified with hand-work alone and "Capital" being almost wholly identified with money-brains alone, but there is barely a whisper to be heard about producing-brains. Yet Capial and Labor without Producing-Brains are entirely helpless and utterly valueless.

Producing-Brains may be dressed in a frock-coat or in overalls, may wear an artist's flowing tie, a four-in-hand or no tie at all. He may be capitalist, general manager, foreman or an unskilled laborer who thinks; he may be inventor, efficiency expert, engineer—any one who is a trained expert or a genius in improving the means and methods of any phase of actual production and distribution. The trouble is that at present, whether he be capitalist, manager or unskilled laborer, the producing-brains receive no recognition *as such*. And yet, if it had not been for producing brains, there would be no machinery or inventions—no production, industry, economics or civilization of any kind beyond those of the cave-man period.

Wouldn't it be a step forward if we not only gave Producing-Brains the recognition he has earned but gradually established him in his rightful position as an economic factor fully on a par with both Capital and Labor?—A. S. H.

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THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

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Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

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The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

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When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

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This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

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General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it, aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire, should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, (lately Capt. A. E. F.) care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps. Hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E.E.HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807 A, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Pinland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

32. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agrl., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

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Explorers, Attention!

DO YOU want to tack your name to a glistening glacier or lofty peak, to name a new river or strange butterfly? You need go no farther than New Zealand, whose Southern Alps hide many a shadowy valley where white foot has never left a trail. And if you seek vast reaches of jungle and whole mountain ranges that are almost as little known as the land round the poles, there is Papua, island of mystery, or Borneo, whose interior is still unmapped:

Question:—"Please give me all the information possible regarding the following: New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa, travel, history, customs, opportunities for adventure, explorers and sportsman.

What kind of game in these countries?"—R. O. HOOKER, Utica, Kansas.

Answer, by Mr. Mills—New Zealand, the Cook Islands, and Samoa all offer opportunities aplenty for the man who is on the lookout for adventures, there is sport quite different in each, and there are also fields for exploration as varied as are the islands themselves.

For instance, although the two islands of New Zealand have been in settlement for over 60 years, there is still interesting work for the explorer out back.

When Sir Thomas Mackenzie, who is now High Commissioner for New Zealand in London, was living out here, just before he became our Premier, and that is only a matter of six or seven years ago, he used to spend his vacation in the interior of far southern Otago, treading where even the feet of the ancient Maori had never trod—and he always came back with a new lake or something else to put on the map.

For the man who likes to put his name to a new glacier our Southern Alps offer rare, and rarefied, opportunities for exploration. And sport! The bush and the stream and the fjiord offer much for gun and rod and line. This is the real sportsman's paradise—but nothing bigger than very wild pigs and lively stags, with the gamest trout in the world. This applies to the North as well as the South Island, and much of the interior of the North Island, which we call the "terra incog." of Maoriland, is unfamiliar to the white people.

The game is small-sized in the Cook Group and Samoa also—and some of the islands are rarely visited by whites—with their interiors for undiscovered beauties. But even the biggest of these islands are not vast.

You will have to go to Papua for the things that are vast and prodigious and mysterious and almost ungettable—a man-size job for the real explorer of things unknown. But if you want to move in a free country with rod and gun, with an exploration into the little or almost unknown as a side line, why, you need not come farther than Maoriland, New Zealand. You should get details of American Samoa from your Secretary in charge at Washington.

WHEN "Ask Adventure" came into being we tried to found it on a more or less definite set of principles. In the following the more important of those principles are restated that you who are readers may understand more clearly just how you can help us make and keep "Ask Adventure" what it should be—a service which gives unbiased information:

WE AIM to keep "Ask Adventure" free from any commercial influences that might in any way influence answers dealing with equipment, any other manufactured products or anything else. We believe in the integrity of our "AA" editors and that we have reason to believe in it. They work under the very definite understanding that the fact that an article is or is not advertised in our magazine has no bearing whatever upon their answers to correspondents—that they are to give their own honest opinions in all cases.

But we want to be a step ahead of that. We don't want even a suspicion of undue influence to fasten upon us or any of our "AA" editors. They feel as we do and S. E. Sangster ("Canuck") and we have agreed that it is best to make a point of stating what there has never been any attempt to conceal—that he conducts a system of sportsmen's camps in northwestern Quebec. He tries to let that fact have no influence upon his answers; we've never been able to see that it has and there's no reason why it should. Just the same, Mr. Sangster and we in the office feel we'd rather have the cards laid out on the table in plain sight.

Going back to the general case of "AA," readers who avail themselves of its free services are asked by all of us concerned in its handling to speak right up if they detect, or think they detect, any undue influence showing in any of the answers sent out. A large part of the questions from readers call for opinions on various articles of equipment, etc., for particular purposes or places and our "AA" experts are supposed to give their honest opinions freely, recommending whatever they believe best in the particular circumstances. If they believe, for example, that a certain make of gun is best for a certain district or purpose it is their job to say so, whatever that make may be. If ever you believe you have sound ground for suspecting one of them, or this magazine itself, to be unduly influenced by any manufacturer, advertiser, railroad, or interests of any kind or any locality, present your case at once. We know that in the long run the value of "AA" depends upon its absolute integrity and we'll be more eager than you are to correct anything that tends the other way.

But—don't go off at half-cock. Only fools or rotters attack another man's integrity and reputation without being very sure they have solid reason to call for an investigation. To condemn a man without waiting for an investigation demands conclusive evidence, not mere suspicion.

Nobody has yet assailed the integrity of any of our "AA" editors. We hope there will never be reason to, but if there is, go to it, remembering that it is not a case for mere loose talk. Occasionally some of our editors have been questioned as to the soundness of certain answers given, but very seldom

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has anybody made good his case against them. They do not claim to be infallible, to know it all. Nobody is, or does. But they are chosen because of their special knowledge of their districts and give you what help they can from what they do know.

In this connection please remember that in covering any country at a distance from our own land we have to choose between a man now actually on the ground, whose answers can not reach inquirers for sometimes two months, or a man who knows the ground but is now in this country where his mailed answers will reach inquirers quickly. We believe the latter type can afford the more practical service of the two and have in most cases acted on that belief. He has personal correspondents in his district and the advantages of information channels bearing on it, so is enabled to keep his data pretty well up to date.

In general, if you see any way to improve "AA" service give us the benefit of your advice.

Ten Months in the Canadian Wilds

MOST of us feel at times that great compelling urge to break away from the hard brick cañons of civilization and seek the vast, beautiful solitudes of the North. Every month in that bracing, pine-scented air, tramping the woods, paddling the rivers has added a year to many a man's life:

Question:—A chum and I want to go to some place where no one will molest us. How about the Muskoka region? Please inform us about the hunting and fishing there. What are the fur-bearing animals one could trap?

How much and what kind of grub should we take to last from August to the following Spring? What kind of guns would be best to carry?

I have chosen Muskoka because my father is an old-timer from there. He lived 10 miles north of Huntsville, but can't tell me how the country is today."—NORMAN E. BARAGER, Fairport, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Times have changed since your father lived in the Muskoka district. There is no place there now where you could hunt and fish *out of season*. If you want to hunt and fish whenever you feel like it, and without respect to open and closed seasons and not be "molested" by any one, you will have to go north—a long way north. North to where there is nobody. But if you want to obey the game and fish laws, hunt and fish and trap in the different seasons as they are open, even then I wouldn't advise the Muskoka district. There are far better districts. Muskoka is rapidly becoming settled, and, with the exception of the immediate vicinity of Algonquin Park, is hunted and trapped too steadily and systematically to make it worth your while for ten or eleven months.

Better try the French River district and pay attention to the lawful seasons; or take the C. N. Railroad to Foleyet and go away back. The north shore of Lake Nipigon or in the vicinity of Lake St. Joseph are wild enough and unsettled enough to assure you of solitude and the lack of white civilization.

The big game of Muskoka: red deer, a few, very few, moose, wolves and bear; the fur-bearers are beaver, otter, mink, muskrat, fox, and occasionally a cat and fisher. The big game of the farther north districts are moose, red deer a few, wolves and bear; the fur-bearers—same as Muskoka, with fisher, marten, and an odd wolverine.

The grub proposition depends on yourselves. What you two lads would eat in ten or eleven months is beyond me. Figure it out for yourselves. What do you want to take with you, and how much of that can, and do, you want to eat? Necessities consist of flour, canned or dried vegetables, salt and sugar. All else are luxuries. Fish and meat are there—if you know how to get them. Sit down with a pencil and paper and figure it out for yourself. Beans, dry, and desiccated potatoes, will do for vegetables if you have flour, and a little bacon will help wonderfully as a change from fresh meat once in a while. But how much you will need is impossible for me to say.

The best make of rifle, in my estimation, is the Savage. Anything heavier than a twenty-two caliber will be heavy enough for any big game in this country—if the arm is a Savage. A twelve-gage shotgun will be very useful for small stuff. If you go North take all the ammunition you will need with you. Also buy your fishing tackle before you entrain.

The Land Without a Winter

THERE are a good many arguments in favor of living in a land which isn't frozen up a third of the year. Especially if a man wants to work or live outdoors. So many millions of Easterners are telling themselves that as soon as they get the necessary capital they intend to forsake their bleak country that what follows should help many to a decision:

Question:—"I am a young man twenty-six years old and married, and have one son. I have wandered around the country pretty much but as yet have never seen California. I am a mechanical engineer and qualified to do any kind of drafting and designing along those lines or handling any mechanical proposition as much as could be expected from a man of my age. I can also feel at home in an agricultural line. So much for myself.

Now here is what I would like to have your opinion about. Could I safely make a shift to Los Angeles or near-by territory and get a situation in any way following my line? Is it any more difficult for an outsider to get employment there than the 'Native Son' as I have heard?

If there is not much of an opportunity in the mechanical field, what other chances are there for a man with about $2,500 capital?

I want to get away from this part of the country and be where there are a few hills and some chance to live a little bit in the open and I believe California offers a chance to do that and at the same time be close enough to civilization to work at least ten or eleven months a year."—LEONARD C. BESSOM, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The folks who gab about the Eastern man being handicapped in com-

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petition with a native son make me tired. Do you not realize that in this city the proportion of native sons is about one to a hundred? Do you not know that when I came here in February, 1886, this was just a sprawling village of thirty or forty thousand and that now it sprawls, but it contains over half a million, according to estimates carefully compiled? Where did the people come from? You can not suppose the race so prolific that it would increase that much by births.

I came here from Ohio and never had any difficulty on account of my being from the East. I have never known of any man's objecting to a workman because he was not a native son. Do you know, I really begin to suspect that some one is going about the East, lying about Los Angeles. So many folks have asked me the same question, I must think so.

About your chances. We are just getting a good start in manufacturing plants. Moreland plans a two-million-dollar truck factory, Goodyear a fifteen-million-dollar rubber factory, a cotton company, a five-million-dollar cotton mill, and numbers of smaller concerns are starting up.

Now it is against my principles to advise any man to move. I don't want any chap to come back at me with a verbal club or a real one. I only tell conditions and let nature take its course, by heck!

If the Japs do not take California too soon and a man has pep and grit, and if he uses the brains God gave him and makes sure before he invests, a man will have about as many chances here as he will where it freezes up for a third of the year, at least. I am not going to tell you to come, but, knowing what I do, I would rather take my chance with $200 out here, than with $2,000 in the East. My sentiments, sir.

That sounds pretty large, does it not? Well, take the problem this way. We have 365 days in our year. In Chicago you have about 150 of fairly good weather, 125 medium bad, 95 too darned cold and the rest too blasted hot. What does your comfort average? Rather punk, eh?

Here we have 250 days simply superb, about forty wet, possibly forty hot, and 35 cold enough to make a fire agreeable, with a little frost at night. Average comfort about 93 per cent., for the frosty mornings turn into beautiful days after nine o'clock and lots of wet days show sunshine in afternoons, while the hot days are comfortable after the sea breeze begins at ten A.M.

If comfort counts for anything, we can put it all over Chicago.

Let me give you the words of a Chicago man, transplanted here.

I got on a car to come home one afternoon and sat down beside a chap of thirty whose face showed that he was an iron-worker, smutty as the deuce. He was watching the homes we passed and his eyes were full of light. He turned to me after a while and exploded.

"By gosh! I'll eat grass before I'll go back to Chicago. I'm going to write the wife to-night to pack her grip, grab the baby and come!"

Now I have given his exact words without adding anything.

Do as you please, but write our Chamber of Commerce, asking for all the data they can give you about southern California; then judge for yourself.

Japan for Americans

IT TAKES nerve, perseverance and shrewdness to compete with our Japanese friends in their own Nippon. But here's a Yankee who proposes to do it. What is more, he has a mighty good chance to succeed if one may judge by the increasing number of American concerns opening branch stores in the "Empire of the Rising Sun." Japan stands at the gateway of vast Siberia whose tremendous resources will soon be given to the world. Those who are on the ground will doubtless get first call:

Question:—"I would like to take a trip to Japan next Winter and need some general information about the country.

Could I work my way across the Pacific? If so, would I need a passport?

After arriving would there be a chance for me to go into business on a small scale?"—EARL M. BRANHAM, Eskdale, W. Va.

Answer, by Grace P. T. Knudson:—If you wish to go across as a passenger it would be advisable to write for latest sailing schedule and ticket rates of Pacific Mail S. S. Company, 508 California Street, San Francisco, Cal., or Nippon Yusen Kaisha, 409 Colman Building, Seattle, Wash.

The latest and best general information for foreigners regarding Japan may be found in a booklet which you can secure by writing to *Secretary Japan Hotel Association*, Traffic Department, Imperial Government Railways, Tokyo, Japan, and asking for a free copy of their Guide Book printed in English.

It is difficult to advise about working one's way over. That would depend entirely upon your own personality and being on the spot to catch whatever might be open on some outgoing steamer or sailing vessel. You'd probably stand more chance on the latter. You might learn something more definite on this point by communicating with some of the big shipping firms like M. W. Joy Company, Pacific Building, San Francisco; Caldwell & Company, or Norton, Lilly & Co., both of San Francisco; or the Pacific Mail S. S. Co., address already given; or Seattle Pacific Trading Co., Leary Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

But your best plan would be to haunt the water-front in person in, preferably, San Francisco or Seattle.

You will need a passport. But it is also difficult to advise about a business venture in Japan. The chances of success of an unknown American starting a business for himself there, ignorant of either manners or language or Japanese nature, would appear to me rather hopeless. Again, it would depend upon your own personality and ability to overcome all sorts of foreign difficulties, and upon the line of business. There is, however, nearly always a chance for a good, bright, clean American chap to find employment with one of the few American business concerns in Yokohama, Kobe, or Tokyo if you are on the spot to snap up an accidental vacancy.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

DOYLE, JOHN. Please send your address to BOB at 15 Linden St., Fitchburg, Mass.

"SLIPPERY SLIM." Please write to your old pal Bill, the chain-ganger.—Address L. T., 396, care of *Adventure.*

STOVER, JACK. Please send your address to BOB at 15 Linden St., Fitchburg, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BUTLER, HARRY. Alias Ruby and Harry Rubenstein. Please write to Phil., your buddie.—Address L. T., 397, care of *Adventure.*

MILLS, FRANK B. Brother. Formerly of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Have important news for you regarding a will. Write. HARRY E. MILLS, Box R, Chadron, Nebr., care of C. Fossan.

PAINTER, THOMAS R. Last heard of in Middlesboro, Ky., and Cattlettsburg in April, 1891. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address F. B. PAINTER, 1203 Eighth Ave., Altoona, Pa.

BUNDY, ELLIS. Last heard of after enlisting in the Merchant Marine at Seattle, Washington, in August, 1919. Please write to your pal.—Address JAMES D. BRAMAN, 105 Second St., Bremerton, Wash.

ASHTON, ROBERT NEWTON. Of Altrincham, Cheshire, England. Last heard of in Los Angeles or Fresno, California. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address RALPH ASHTON, 39 Stanford St., Altrincham, Cheshire, England.

WILKINSON, FRED W. Last heard of in Spokane, Washington, between the years 1891 and 1893. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. FLORENCE WILKINSON NICOLINI, Typist, Room 14, 67 Kukui St., Honolulu, T. H.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

MOUCH, PEARL McCANDLISS. A native of Piqua, Ohio. Married Harry Mouch of Troy, Ohio, in 1904. Last heard from in Oakland, Cal., in 1913. Any information will be gladly received by her old friend LULA HESTER (maiden name).—Address MRS. W. J. VALLEY, Box 419, Elma, Wash.

FAIRBANKS, LUTHER S. Sometimes known as Lou Samuels. Blacksmith and engineer. Formerly from Wisconsin. Last heard from about twenty years ago in New York City. His sister would be glad to know if he is living. —Address MRS. ELVA F. WATERMAN, Box 95, Fairfield, Wash.

DICK H. Please write to your wife.

COVINGTON, WM. G. Last heard of at Mobile, Ala. Six feet tall; has light hair. Any information regarding his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address ROSCOE STANLEY, 996 East Alexandrine Ave., Detroit, Mich.

TREBER, BIRCH. Brother. Born at Cynthiana, Ohio. Last heard of at Hibbings, Minn., in 1895. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHN C. TREBER, 1520 S. Branson St., Marion, Ind.

LORAK, EDWARD. Of Seattle, Washington. Please write to your old friend and chum. Important news.—Address CARL YTTREGARD, 1022 Terry Ave., Seattle, Wash.

CARSON, JAMES. Who asked for Fred Strettzel. Write me and let me know your address.—Address CORP. DICK THOMPSON, Troop K, 5th Cavalry, Marfa, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

DOUTHWRIGHT, FREDERICK. Age thirty-seven. Last heard of in Everville shoe-shop. Has hazel eyes, sandy hair. Write to mother; am anxious to hear from you. —Address MRS. WM. DOUTHWRIGHT, Municipal Home, Moncton, Leger Corner, N. B., Canada.

DOUTHWRIGHT, WILLIAM. Last heard of in U. S. Army. Black hair, black eyes, tall and straight. Write to mother. Am anxious to hear from you.—Address MRS. WM. DOUTHWRIGHT, Municipal Home, Moncton, Leger Corner, N. B., Canada.

BELLOWS, FRED L. About five and one-half feet tall, slim, blue eyes, fair complexion, age now about fifty-six. Last heard of in 1904 from Seattle, Washington. Any information as to his whereabouts or the whereabouts of his children will be appreciated.—Address S. A. BRICKELL, P. O. Box 185, Anchorage, Alaska.

GREELY, PEARL ADAM. Age sixteen years, weight 145 pounds, blue eyes, dark brown curly hair, three-cornered scar on left wrist. Last heard of November 2nd. May be in the Navy. Any one knowing his whereabouts kindly communicate with his sister.—MISS ESTHER GREELY, 309 L St., Hoquiam, Wash.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BARKER, DONALD. Son. Left home two years ago. Last heard from in June from Washington. Has fair complexion, brown hair, blue eyes. Was also known as George Baker. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. FLORENCE BARKER, 349 South Clinton St., Carthage, N. Y.

HESTER, CLIFFORD E. A native of Cincinnati, Ohio. Last heard from was in San Francisco in 1917. He is forty-four years old. Any information will be gladly received by his sister.—Address MRS. W. J. VALLEY, Box 419, Elma, Wash.

STOKES, VINCENT WALTER. Twenty-two years old, chestnut hair, dark brown eyes, six feet two inches tall. Last heard of July, 1918, from Oregon. He also lived in Tacoma and Seattle, Washington. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—MRS. GEORGE H. MILLER, 44 S. 4th St., Fairmount Park, Expo, Va.

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Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

RUSSELL, WILLIAM JEFFERSON. Grandfather. Left southern Illinois in 1896 for Cripple Creek, Colo. Have heard rumors of his being in House of Representatives at Cheyenne, Wyo., in 1902, from the 25th district; in 1902 in Cheyenne again, and in 1904 in Denver, Colo. Interested in several gold mines in and around Denver. Is known to have stayed at hotel in Denver from which he disappeared. Is about five feet eight inches, weighs 160 pounds, right eye gone, light mustache, between sixty and sixty-five years old. May be an assayer or prospector. Any information will be appreciated.—Address H. ADOLPH KRAUSS, 4051a Detondy St., St. Louis, Mo.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-May or First June ADVENTURE. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

BAKER, WILLIAM H.; Brice, Edward Clifton; Campbell, Jenner S.; Colfar, Annie; Cridland, Arthur; Curran, John; Curry, Jas. F.; Donnegan, Charlie; Eklund, Nellie DeCloud; Felingham, Fred L.; Graham, Mrs. Annie; Green, James; Hayes, Frank F.; Heddelson, Thomas; Hickock, Parke; Hurlbut, Wm.; Jones, Ralph; Kroh, H. D.; Kromer, Raymond; Lee, D. F.; Lynch, Eddie; Mathews, Louis P.; Mills, Joseph; Mullin, Michael; 116th Overseas Draft Canadian M. T. Outfit; Parker, Gus; Peoples, Chas.; Perry, Jim; Pleasants, Robert T.; Seibert, Charles E.; Settle, Samuel; Stone, Eleanor K.; Stremple, H. E.; Thomas, Mrs. S. S.; Vanderburg, Thomas; Vestle; Wobber, George and Adolf.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; H. E. Copp; J. Dunn; J. Higmon; E. Cunningham; Dennis F. Crolly; L. E. Patten.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us their present address and proof of identity:

BEATON, SGT.-MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bonner, Major, J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Erwin Phil.; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Garson, Ed.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Hines, Joseph; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Johnson, Walter R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Koltzau, John; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Capt. Harry, A.R.C., Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock", Lovett, Harold S., McAdams, W. B.; McGrath, Jack W., MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E. Martel, Leon H.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phipps, Corbett C.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rinkenbach, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Stremple, H. E.; Swan, George L., Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; Woon, Basil D.; Zorek, Leon; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S 177284; 439; WS-XV.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST JULY ISSUE

THE WAR-CLOTH A Complete Novel *By J. Allan Dunn*

What befell the natives of a South Sea island because of the strange fetish they worshiped.

THE SHU KING *By Robert J. Pearsall*

Koshinga the head of the Ko Lao Hui *tong* seeks new allies in his scheme for world mastery. This time he plans to inveigle the powerful scholar class of the young Chinese republic into coming to the support of his cause.

THE BETTER HEAD* *By Alexander Hull*

Paris pays high prices for the gorgeous skins of birds of Paradise which "the little brown beggars" of Polynesia trap for *Nganoni* the devil-devil. But *Dan Swayd* pays a higher price still. * An Off-the-Trail story.

WHEN THE PILGRIMS HIT PIPEROCK *By W. C. Tuttle*

"There ain't no use talking," remarks *Ike Harper*, "Piperock can't entertain without a casualty list." And the Thanksgiving Day tableau is just another case in point.

ESPRIT DE CORPS *By Roy P. Churchill*

The dislike that *First Lieutenant Hoyt* and *Marine Private Cavanaugh* take to each other was bad for the *esprit de corps* of H Company. But that is only the prelude to what happens when the *Sitka*, U. S. N., puts into harbor off San Domingo City and Satan finds work for idle hands.

FOR A' THAT *By George L. Catton*

Even the iron-muscled, low-browed foreign muckers of the mining-camp call him *"the Brute."* But when the balance is struck all Alaska admits he's a Man.

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS *By Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*

Jim Clark recognizes the knife that lies in the pool of blood beside his brother's dead body. But he finds a better clue in a game of solitaire.

GYVED *By Henry Leverage*

The cracking of Groudman's private bank is a matter of concern alike to the police of Newark and New York as well as to *Chester Fay*, the master cracksman, and his friends.

WULFHERE Part III *By A. B. Higginson*

How *Wulfhere* fares among the strange bear-people, and how he meets *Wiglaf*.

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